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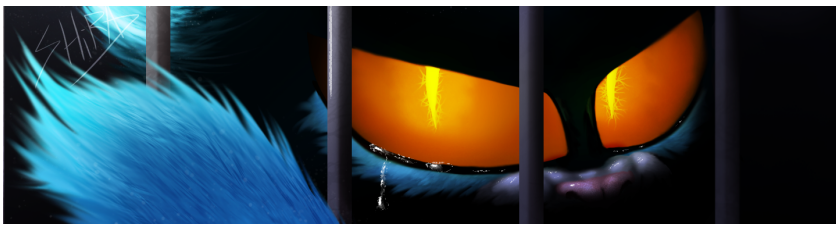
Chapter 1 - Sunshine



Note 14 oct 2024: this trilogy is currently being REWRITTEN! Please bear in mind you're about to read the old and outdated writing of this alternative universe/fanfic.

Nicole's POV

Ah yes, summer vacation is right around the corner. It means weeks off from school for the kids, warm weather and pondering about leaving the house or not. Vacation is a word which isn't written well in my mind's dictionary, as those weeks used to only increase my stress. But it's fine. Everything is fine. I started going back to work a month after the... disaster... and actually felt a bit relaxed. Yoshida went easy on my task amount and offered me a proper holiday for the first time. Darn, it's been a long time since I've genuinely had one of those as my shifts overarched almost every entire year. I mean, of course I understand that due to me being the only one providing for my household, but I was beyond surprised when my boss seemed to be so compassionate. Me being one of the Rainbow Factory's best employees is a fact, so I guess he did not want to lose me another time.

But goshdarnit, Elmore is such a confusing town to live in... Donut Sheriff hadn't shown up in a long time and no one seemed to check my behaviour like before. As if... they forgot or avoided me... Could that be? Are they all scared? Does everyone really know about my past crimes? Do they know... about my *issue*?

Oh dear, bet that hasn't left me... It's a condition bound to haunt my

bones till I take my final breath. But should I be worried? It's been more than six months since my fangs had even elongated, mostly because I finally started putting effort into remembering to take in the Arthrus, a medical herb that functions as temporarily antidote. I have deep regrets about the past, but Richard told me many times that I need to let go of it. The past isn't changeable. I tried to fix as much as I could and all seemed to quite have gone back to its usual. But something slightly throbs in my head... And no, it's not one of the zillion headaches I've had before.

Now I come to think of it, only the law enforcement and a few individuals truly know about the... so-called *Upper Limit*... that lives inside me. The Wilsons soon went quiet after I viciously hospitalized their father and they never dared to get near us again. But they aren't the ones I should worry about, nor Carrie or my therapist... It's Penny who I started to worry about. She seemed so timid lately while everyone else in fact started getting hyped for summer vacation. What is going through that fairy right now?

I feel so ashamed for having let savagery unfold that night again. I even have to force myself not to gag when I recall foraging on my family members, Darwin specifically. It was an extremely foolish action from me which resulted in both my sons' girlfriends getting involved... and them having to face a wretched monster. To my surprise, that viciousness could be tamed by spoken words. Spoken words by Penny and not a single leaf of Arthrus was involved... How did she do that? She seemed powerful yet terrified...

But how she heartbrokenly looked me in the eye while I was at my ultimate worst, she now doesn't dare to make any eye contact at all anymore... What should I do? Just... enrol with it and wait? She promised not to tell anyone...

Right?

General POV

Monday 3.00PM – Elmore Boulevard

[The sun shines brightly in the cloudless sky and indicates summer season has arrived again, without the temperature even being boiling yet. Lots of Elmore citizens wander on the streets while occasionally entering various shops for their holiday expenditures. Among the colourful silhouettes and sunglasses, four known figures are on their way to a stand they expect to visit often. A bright red, folded roof gives away that it's the most wanted service under the warm sun; ice cream! A legged goldfish is the first one to step forward and order a frozen treat for each of his three companions from Larry. Once the blue kitten, yellow fairy and pink flower received their ice creams as well, the four take their pace towards the end of the street.]

Gumball: Yo! Only two weeks of school left, guys!

Darwin: Heh, you bet I'm ready for another Zelmore binge!

Leslie: Yeah. Now I think about it, time has flown!

Darwin: Do you have any plans for the summer, Leslie?

Leslie: I definitely do! Nothing better than visiting the one and only summer collection catwalk in Minnesota. A dream come true for a fashion boy like me. [Chuckles]

[Gumball raises an eyebrow, but reminds himself to stay polite when Darwin gives him a glare.]

Gumball: Cool! Eh... you do you, dude.

[Leslie chuckles again as he knows Gumball doesn't have any interest at all, but still smiles at the kitten.]

Leslie: What about you then? Are you two seriously gonna spend those whole eleven weeks behind a screen?

Gumball: I- Uhm...

Darwin: Mrs. Mom won't allow that. Besides, it's up to her and Mr. Dad if we're going on a trip.

Gumball: Yeah, that reminds me; Mom told she'd have a summer

vacation for the first time.

Leslie: Woah, that's something new. But I bet she deserves it!

Darwin: Yeah. But with that said, Gumball, we might as well not make anything too complicated for her.

Gumball: O-of course. T-there's no way I'd want to get in trouble though.

[Gumball grits his teeth when memories about months ago rise within him and suddenly searches for the opportunity to change the subject. Realizing Penny had been quiet all the time, he turns to her and tries giving a reassuring smile. Penny shyly raises her head while having her hands nervously folded together after finishing her ice cream.]

Gumball: Pen? Are you alright?

Penny: Y-yes... I'm fine.

Gumball: Are you sure about that? You know you can tell me anything, right? Unless you prefer talking about it in private...

Penny: N-no, it's just... I- I kind of struggle with processing...

Gumball: Processing what?

[Penny lowers her head again and her glow becomes slightly dull as her wings fold themselves up. Leslie, immediately noticing his cousin feeling uneasy, steps closer and puts a leaf around her shoulder.]

Leslie: Oh honey, I really thought you were doing well today. Do you want to talk about it later perhaps?

Penny: It's something I c-can't really... [Glares at Gumball] ...tell. I'm sorry.

Leslie: Don't worry, you don't have to. Just remember I'm here for you.

Gumball: [Awkwardly] Y-yeah, I- I'm here for you too, Penny.

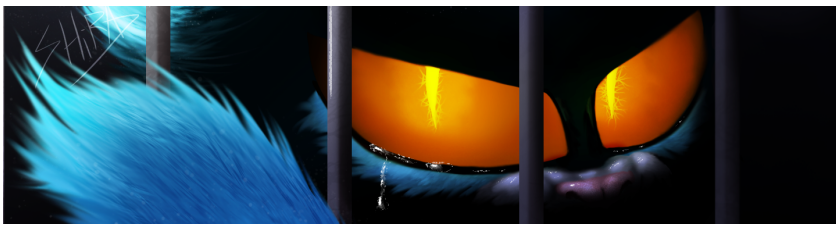
[Leslie shakes his head and steps aside in order to let Gumball hug her.]

Darwin: Now, are we still going to the hills or not?

Gumball: Yeah, yeah, bro. Let's go!

[Gumball gently takes Penny's hand and both share a smile before taking their pace again.]

Chapter 2 - Dusk



7.00PM

[Nicole closing the front door after entering caught Richard off guard, who just finished doing the dishes after their kids went upstairs. The blue feline drops her purse on the couch, only to immediately settle next to it while holding onto her shirt's collar with one paw. She isn't aware of her husband not letting his eyes move away from her silhouette, as he keeps staring at her with a slight frown. The pink bunny isn't sure how he should feel. The past few months might have been a great relief and let him catch up with his missed rest, but his mind doesn't feel peaceful at all. In fact, every slight bit of unease he noticed his wife giving off brought back some fear. Stone-cold fear that made him doubt his own thoughts. Seeing Nicole being busy with everything she used to do before made him realize how much he missed it. But at the same time he knows it won't be the same ever again. It's a thought which only leaves him heartbroken after just having seen the cat droop her ears.

Richard puts the last dried-off pan in one of the kitchen cabinets and opens up a cupboard, only to notice a few packages of Arthrus being stacked on top of each other. He intensively stares at them for a few minutes and closes the door. After taking a deep breath, he moves towards the living room, where Nicole sits leaned back on the couch with her eyes half closed. Richard doesn't have to take another step or the blue feline already calls out his presence.]

Nicole: [Yawns] Oh hey, honey. I didn't expect you to be in the kitchen.

[The blue feline visually trying her best to smile makes Richard aware of how tired she currently is, and he decides to settle next to her after gently putting her purse on the carpet.]

Richard: Heh, well I just figured to do some chores.

Nicole: You? Chores? Is that still my fluffy bunny who's speaking?

[Nicole's chuckling caused Richard to smile briefly, but no matter how badly he wanted to laugh by her joke, imaginary weights of upwelling guilt and worry pull his shoulders down. Nicole notices he hesitates speaking up the next second, and her smile disappears while Richard's ears drop. Her pupils enlarge as she slowly moves closer until she can rest her head on his shoulder, only for Richard to gulp in response.]

Nicole: Is something wrong? Again, I'm so sorry this shift's ending got delayed another time...

Richard: N-no, that's not it... In fact, I'm glad enough that you manage working again really.

Nicole: Then... why the long face?

Richard: I just... I don't know...

Nicole: It's okay if you can't find the words, but... just remember you can tell me anything.

Richard: I just hope... you're alright?

Nicole: If I'm... alright? Honey, I am. You've seen me doing well last months, right?

Richard: Y-yes, of course.

Nicole: Then why are you still worried about me when all went back to normal?

Richard: I-if I'm honest... You kind of have the habit to say you're fine while in fact you aren't.

Nicole: B-but I mean it this time. I don't understand why y-

[Richard interrupts his wife with tearing up eyes.]

Richard: It didn't all go back to normal, Nicole. I'm sorry to say that... But it's the truth.

Nicole: W-what?

Richard: Your condition, honey! It's not... gone.

Nicole: But we have a cure for it! With temporarily effect then, but I've handled taking it in regularly now...

[When the blue cat notices her words don't manage reassuring her husband, she lowers her head and looks the other way.]

Nicole: A-are you scared... I will forget it again?

Richard: N-no... Y-yes... I mean, I'm not sure. That's all it is. A gamble per day whether you will forget it or not.

Nicole: If there's one thing I want to make sure, honey... it's that I'm keeping up with trying my best not to forget it like I used to, okay? I've learned from my mistakes in the harsh way, but I refuse to let those repeat themselves.

Richard: I- I fully trust you on that, though I'm still so scared...

Nicole: S-scared that I will transform?

Richard: Actually I'm more terrified of what the possible consequence could be...

Nicole: C-consequence? Y-you mean regarding my actions?

[Richard can't handle speaking up anymore as tears start flowing down his cheeks. He tries to hide the fact he feels engrieved by remembering what Erin Warrington told him sometime ago... *Massive vein rending... Caused by the tension in your wife's body... Result in nothing but decease...* Though Erin explained it were only potential consequences, Richard's mind did not hold on to that

completely, as he only starts feeling responsible for the supermarket incident again...

Nicole's ears drop as well after she looked him in the eye again and she attempts wrapping her arms around the pink bunny, but he stops her by grabbing her wrists and slowly pushes them down.]

Nicole: Richard?

[Richard tightly squeezes his eyes shut for a second before straightening his back and drying his tears. He takes a deep breath and slowly gets up from the couch.]

Richard: I'm sorry, honey. I don't know what just came over me... I think I just need to learn how to process the past situations better.

Nicole: Gosh dear, I completely relate to that. And I understand.

Richard: I think it'll be alright... What you're saying makes sense, so I really don't know why I'm overreacting...

[Nicole gets up too and this time Richard lets her wrap her arms around him. She tilts her head and gives him a quick nuzzle on the nose with hers.]

Nicole: You're not overreacting. In fact, there's no doubt that you've been the bravest bunny ever last months... You kept sticking with me, I'm grateful for that.

[Richard sighs and a smile slowly evolves on his snout. He feels that he's getting a bit more relaxed and his weighted thoughts fade into the background as he caresses the fur in between his wife's ears.]

Richard: It's... It's the least I could do for you.

Nicole: I love you, honey.

Richard: Yeah... love you too.

[Before Richard could take a step into the direction of their bedroom, Nicole quickly shows him a paper she grabbed from her purse.]

Nicole: By the way, I almost forgot telling you. Apparently tomorrow evening is the parent gathering for Gumball and Darwin's class. I'll take care of us getting there, but make sure you remember.

Richard: Ah I see. I'll try my best to keep it in mind, or I'll write it down somewhere.

Nicole: I expect to be home earlier than today, so you don't have to worry about cooking another day. [Chuckles]

Richard: Well if anything, I don't mind cooking at all. Even though there are only a few dishes I nail heh.

Nicole: Don't underestimate yourself, dear. Besides, judging from overtime, you've grown a lot with everything.

Richard: Y-you think?

Nicole: Yes! You did chores today? You... you make better decisions, you started bothering to get off the couch more, you even started figuring stuff out by yourself...

[The blue feline leaves the pink bunny lost for words as he both feels shy and flattered by hearing her say this. He submissively lowers his head and holds his arms together on his back while slightly bending his knees towards each other. Nicole steps forward and gently puts her paw on his cheek.]

Nicole: I'm so proud of you. Prouder than your mother ever could be.

Richard: Heh... Now don't start about your rivalry with her again.

[Richard trying to chuckle out of joy while still getting tears in his eyes makes Nicole open her arms while having a broad smile on her face.]

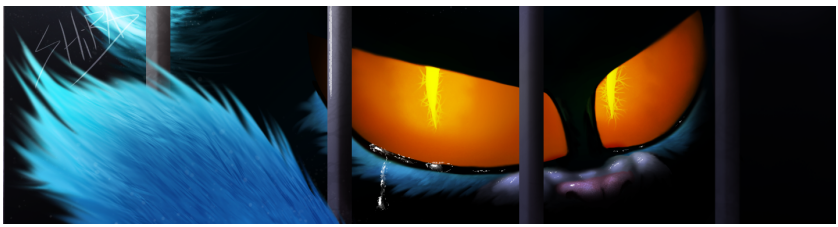
Nicole: Ahw... C'mere you.

[The blue mouser pulls the pink leporid towards her and lets him rest his head on her chest as she keeps holding onto him. No matter how Richard's thoughts haven't disappeared yet, he still feels safer

than he could ever be. The fact his wife told him she's proud of him without stuttering once like another time made his heart glow. Besides, what is he even worried about?

That Nicole will eventually feel hesitation towards her medication?

Chapter 3 - Antlers



Tuesday 6.00PM

[The sun didn't set yet as the atmosphere unfolds in the typical look of a summer evening. While the Elmore citizens have dinner, a specific household decides to join in the early pattern as well. Judith Fitzgerald tried to outdo herself with tonight's dinner, as she felt determined to challenge her cooking possibilities. The shelled fairy always does everything she can to keep her family happy, besides not saying no to new experiences, while being extremely eager and perfectionistic. But at the other hand, she can be pretty reasonable if she wants to. This usually is the case when her husband Patrick is involved. The tall and big-antlered shelled fairy is just as strong as he looks and his defensiveness for his family is even stronger than his wife's. Due to his knowledge about how vulnerable his species can be, his overprotectiveness could sometimes get out of control. Especially over his daughter Penny, how she hates it.

Penny tries to understand he only means good with his protecting and knows she got into trouble with her powers before. But she only sees that one day as a good lesson. It was when she broke free from her shell in Gumball's presence and ran away because of a misunderstanding. She also felt too vulnerable and insecure to properly process her feelings, and tried to escape while taking the forms of beasts she saw herself as. But Penny isn't a beast. Not at all. Gumball made her realize that after he encountered her in the forest, in a wolfish form evolved from grief. The yellow fairy wasn't the same ever since. She still gratefully thanks Gumball for teaching her something so important that night.

Transformations aren't new to Penny. She started getting used to her powers and learned how to live with them, and even saw use in them. She has seen lots of forms of herself and refused to go back into her shell for that matter. It's a part of her now and should be something she's proud of. But no matter how well she now understands the concept of her own shapeshifting, something about it in general just... worries her. But no, not regarding her own change of form...]

Patrick: Penny, are you coming? Dinner's served!

[Her father's calling from downstairs snapped Penny out of her thoughts. She stares blankly at the papers of her notebook in front of her and slowly gets up from her chair.]

Penny: I'm coming!

[She immediately sighs after hearing her father making his way into the dining room and she glances one more time at her papers. She feels disappointed for not having been able to do homework another day. It's not long until school's out, but she's too far behind schedule. She didn't manage to complete her tasks, which is extremely unusual for the yellow fairy. She is too distracted by her thoughts and actually had a few emotional breakdowns at night. But she didn't want to tell her parents. Because she made a strong promise... she isn't planning to break...

After Penny settled at the dining table with her parents and little sister Polly, she can't handle faking her smile any longer and keeps her head low with a frown on her face. Judith fills each plate of her family members and offers them drinks, but at first glance isn't aware of Penny's unease. After three of the fairies dug in to their meals, Patrick is the first one to notice his daughter actually not being alright. He tries to recall whether he yelled at her about something, but can only conclude he had been softer than usually the last days. This brings him immediate confusion and he actually starts feeling worried. While Judith cleans Polly's cheeks with a napkin, Patrick lowers his shoulders and bends a bit forward in order to look his oldest daughter in the eye. Penny tries to force her tears to stay inside as soon as flashbacks play in front of her eyes again. *Why now!*, she restlessly thinks and her wings lower

themselves. She can see it all again... She can hear it all again... The gigantic silhouette towering above her... The terrifyingly sharp teeth... and yellow eyes that stared into her soul.

Penny would rather run upstairs, but she knows that would be the least clever thing to do. She promised *her*... She promised *Nicole* she wouldn't tell anyone... She remembers the cat looked her in the eye in the most pleading way, which was completely unusual. But can the yellow fairy still handle it? Can she? She doesn't know... She really doesn't know...]

Patrick: H-hey, sweetie? Is anything wrong?

[Penny isn't used to hearing her father being so sensitive either and this only makes her heart shatter as she suddenly bursts into tears. She can't take it anymore. It has been roughly half a year since the incident and all these months were the most mentally gruelling she has ever had. She never felt so scared and miserable before. Patrick rises from his chair and quickly steps towards his daughter and takes her on his lap. Penny tightly holds onto his shoulders and cries while burying her face in his shell. Patrick's eyebrows rise in deep concern as he gently strokes the back of her head and hushes her.]

Patrick: It's gonna be okay... I'm here... Just take a deep breath, Penny.

[Penny follows his advice and tries to take deep breaths. Her sobbing gets less, but tears still flow down her cheeks. Judith gives her husband and oldest daughter a concerning glare, but as soon as she notices him comforting her, she decides to take Polly upstairs. She lets the little shelled fairy play in her room and immediately returns downstairs again, only to stay around the corner of the dining room's entrance in order to eavesdrop out of curiosity. Patrick isn't used to seeing his daughter so scared as he feels that she can't help shivering. *What in the what has happened to her?*, he thinks.]

Patrick: Now... Tell me, who has hurt you?

Penny: N-no one...

Patrick: No one?

Penny: No one hurt me, Dad...

Patrick: Then why the fright...?

Penny: I- I just... I just... feel overwhelmed right now...

Patrick: Overwhelmed? But sweetie, it's summer holiday in two weeks. Did something happen at school today?

Penny: N-no. M-my day was fine.

[Patrick then gives her a slightly stern glance as he lets her look into his eyes through his shell. Penny keeps her hands tightly together and wipes away some tears, only for them to start flowing down in heavy amounts again.]

Penny: [Whispers] I'm scared, Dad...

Patrick: You're scared? O-of what?

[Penny immediately avoiding eye contact makes Patrick now realize how serious this is. He carefully takes her head into his hands and moves his face closer to hers.]

Patrick: Tell me, Penny. Please.

[Penny almost starts hyperventilating and this causes her to have no other option but come clean... No matter how strongly she did not want to.]

Penny: G-Gumball's mom!

[Patrick's gasping is very soft, but still shows how this information surprised him. He tilts an eyebrow and lets his daughter hug him again.]

Patrick: N-Nicole? But why? She hasn't done anything to you, or has she?

Penny: Y-you wouldn't understand... I- I-... I'm so sorry I didn't tell you earlier... I promised her that I'd keep it a secret, but I-

Patrick: Keep what a secret?

Penny: Oh-

Patrick: Penny, please. I beg you to tell what happened or what is going on. If this truly dragged you down so badly, we need to fix it immediately.

Penny: I-it can't be fixed!

Patrick: And why not?

Penny: Dad, listen... S-she didn't hurt me. N-nothing got too much o-out of hand, but... s-she did give me a cold scare. Y-you see, she has this condition and I-

Patrick: Condition? I knew she had issues, but I didn't know about that. What type does she suffer from?

Penny: That's the thing. It's so rare that they even gave *her* the honour to name it.

[Patrick grits his teeth as he fears the worst and his eyes widen.]

Patrick: A-and something happened with it?

Penny: [Whispers with a trembling voice] *She transformed.*

Patrick: She what?

Penny: [Sighs] Look, t-this is gonna sound ridiculous... But it appears she struggles with another form of her and I saw it in front of my own eyes. It was worse than what I can remember of...

[Patrick tilts his head a slight bit and Penny frowns after going silent for a few seconds.]

Penny: Dad? D-do you remember the supermarket rampage from almost two years ago?

Patrick: Oh... Yes, I actually do. Wasn't it Nicole who went bers-

[Patrick shuts his mouth as soon as he realizes what Penny truly means and shakes his head in order not to recall that rather terrifying moment he experienced, as he was one of the innocent customers who had no choice but fleeing once the blue cat lost her temper.]

Patrick: So you're telling me...

Penny: S-she can turn into a monstrous version of herself... B-but way and way worse than what you s-saw in the supermarket. I'm not f-fully sure what it's entirely about a-and how it works, but... it's terrifying.

[Patrick frowns and lets Penny get off his lap as he rises from his seat with a darkening expression. Penny gets more nervous by this and can't even feel relieved for having told about what scared her. Instead, she feels extreme guilt rising within her as she deeply regrets confessing it now... She got it slightly off her chest, but at what cost...?]

Penny: D-dad?

Patrick: I can't believe it...

Penny: N-no, please! Whatever you're thinking right now, it's not like t-that... please.

Patrick: How do you know? This woman could've gotten you into fatal danger! *That* raging whirlwind in the supermarket was already worse enough and if it only downgraded since then, I could've lost a daughter!

Penny: No, stop! You're overreacting!

Patrick: I am NOT overreacting! Now don't tell me it all occurred while you had that sleepover at Carrie's...

Penny: That's uhm...

Patrick: Say no more.

[Tears start flowing down Penny's cheeks again as she wraps her arms around herself. The yellow fairy feels even worse than before and shakes her head briefly in frustration.]

Penny: Y-you don't get it! S-she didn't harm me at all! It was just... a scary experience and... I m-managed to snap her out of the outburst!

Patrick: So you even FIXED it for the Wattersons themselves?!

Penny: It was an unfortunate combination of things happening at once! I can't explain it. But please believe me when I say it all went well afterwards! I- I'm still completely alive and well!

Patrick: But you were scared, right?

Penny: B-but not of... I mean... Of course I was scared, Dad! Even the time I saw my dragon form in the mirror couldn't ever top what I saw... But I- I'm just scared for Gumball... and his family... A-and for Nicole herself! She c-can't do anything about this and i-it's not like she chose this...

Patrick: That is not your concern, Penny. Furthermore, if this condition haunted her for a longer time, she should've found precautions or cures for it.

Penny: S-she has those! B-but I think she j-just forgot it that night...

Patrick: FORGOT?! How can one possibly forget stuff to prevent disaster...

Penny: We all make mistakes, Dad... You don't know about the guilt that runs through her... She seemed so lost and I've never seen that side of her before. If *she* is scared, you know it's a real bad situation. She's scared of herself... of her past actions and even her murd-

Patrick: What?!

Penny: I- I... [Whispers] *I'm so sorry-*

Patrick: You're telling me now... She has MURDERED PEOPLE?!

[Penny tries to speak up, but no sound comes from her voice and she nods briefly instead. Patrick's shoulders rise in unease and he clenches his hands into fists.]

Patrick: This has gone too far. This isn't normal, Penny. It isn't normal to hide events like this from your parents, no matter how much you've been manipulated.

Penny: I w-wasn't manipulated!

Patrick: Oh of course not... YOU WERE DRIVEN BY FEAR OF THAT RECKLESS MONSTER!

Penny: She's NOT A MONSTER, DAD!

[Penny gasps and covers her mouth due to her sudden shouting. Patrick snorts in rage and sternly turns around, only to storm upstairs.]

Penny: Dad, please!

Patrick: [Yells from upstairs] OH, SAVE IT!

[Patrick slamming the door closed breaks Penny's heart as she can't feel any worse. She lets herself fall onto her knees and sobs while covering her face. Judith immediately runs to her as soon as she noticed her husband going upstairs and takes her daughter in her arms. Feeling slight anger towards Patrick for letting his emotions influence his overall thinking, she tries to reassure Penny.]

Judith: You know he didn't mean it like that, right? The stubborn peanut's got a lot to process. It's not your fault...

Penny: [While sobbing] I- I can't help this... I broke my promise to Nicole and only made things worse...

Judith: Now, you should know that I am in favour of what your father told you about hiding things like that from us. Though I completely understand you feel lots of pity for her and only wanted to help.

Penny: I d-do want to help!

Judith: But you also need to understand you cannot change the world unfortunately.

Penny: [Sighs] I- I know... But this is Gumball's mother we're talking about. She doesn't deserve this agony! A-and Dad probably hates her even more now and I-

Judith: Penny, breathe. Just... let it all flow through you for a moment. If this struggle has been with Nicole since a long time ago, she'll soon enough find her way in it.

Penny: H-how are you so sure?

Judith: Because you eventually found your way... with your powers. So if you can do it, she can too.

Penny: I- I don't know... Something just doesn't feel right. Besides, s-she's not a fairy like us, Mom. S-she isn't supposed to transform...

Judith: Well, overall, let it slide. I understand this made a huge impact on you and I honestly can't be glad enough that the situation ended well. But you should focus on yourself now. You can stay supportive and understanding, but you really need to let Nicole find her own way. Find her way like you found yours. And I don't care if she's a fairy or not. She's a grown adult overall and I *know* she will make it happen.

Penny: Y-you're right...

[Penny wipes away some tears and raises her head to look at her mother.]

Penny: D-did you... know her when she was younger?

Judith: Oh I sure did. We were in the same class. Although I never really got into contact with her. She seemed nice to talk with and I really wished we could've at least gotten to know each other better, but I figured her parents didn't allow it.

Penny: They didn't? Gosh... that must've been terrible.

Judith: Yes, but that luckily changed once Gumball came into the

picture, honey. Your boyfriend is the main reason why we finally got into contact. Believe it or not, we actually had some moments to catch up during parent gatherings. But of course you didn't know about those.

Penny: [Sniffs] Well, I'm glad you still got around to talk with her. I can imagine it must be hard for her to find supportive people that aren't... scared.

Judith: Hey, snap out of it. It's alright. She isn't on her own and has my full understanding. Your father on the other hand... He just needs more time to think about it.

Penny: I-is he gonna do something bad to her, you think?

Judith: I wouldn't allow it. But please, don't you worry about that. If it makes you feel better, I can speak with her at tonight's gathering? I heard she'll be there.

Penny: S-sure. B-but I'm not sure if she's gonna like the fact I didn't keep the secret...

Judith: Then what? She isn't gonna hurt you. I also expect from her to be extremely understanding, because... what do you expect when you give a thirteen year old girl such a big responsibility?

Penny: Ugh I just... I feel so bad about it...

Judith: Then I won't tell her. We can just keep the secret right here. I promise you I won't open my mouth about it.

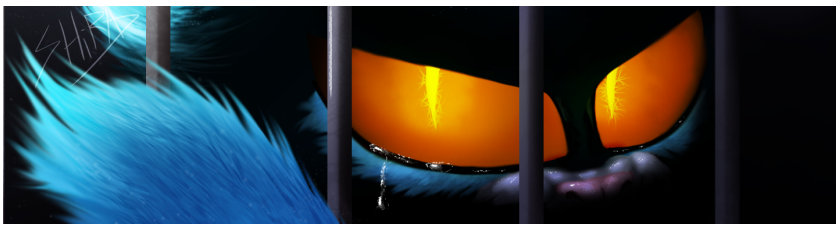
Penny: A-and Dad?

Judith: [Sighs] I'll try to convince him.

Penny: T-thank you, Mom.

Judith: Anytime, dear.

Chapter 4 - Cold assumption



[Judith has always known how likely Patrick is to letting his emotions run over him, mostly due to his continuous stubbornness and short fuse. No matter how harsh he could be, Judith still tries her best to keep him in the right lane without getting into trouble. But it wasn't him causing trouble most of the time, it usually was trouble coming at him... With that said, the Wattersons were mostly responsible for that. Patrick isn't keen on the family. He remembers all the times they destroyed property, pulled him into shenanigans and messed with his temper. Not to forget his daughter's relationship with the blue kitten who he found the most outlandish, along with his rabbit father. Gumball annoyed him many times when it was about getting into contact with Penny and even managed to completely ruin his important business meeting. He tried to remind himself of the fact the kitten didn't mean it and tries his best, but it wasn't him who he blamed... His big disliking towards him also came from Gumball's parents.

Richard was definitely the one who would make him snap most, as he even remembers almost getting into a fight with him once. Despite him denying and wanting to work it out with Richard, the bunny hit him with a rake instead and that left the shelled fairy confused ever since. He never bothered paying attention to him in his younger years, even though Richard had always been the 'silly' kid around. Nicole, on the other hand, is a huge mystery to Patrick. He knows about her overall aggressive behaviour, yet the supermarket rampage left him astonished. *What was that?* He had never seen such monstrosity before and, oh boy, how it scared him. The shelled fairy barely knows fear, mostly thanks to his great eagerness to stay protective of the ones he cares about, but *that*...

That was definitely one of the worst and few times he actually experienced fear. He became even more distant of the Wattersons since then, only to stop caring about the times Penny would hang out with Gumball at random places. He didn't mind that specifically, but something about Penny *going over* to the Wattersons house doesn't feel right. And especially not after processing what Penny just told him...]

Judith: Hey, darling?

[Judith unexpectedly entering their bedroom caught Patrick off guard and he quickly turns his head. His dark expression hasn't faded yet, but he seems less infuriated. Judith invites him to sit down on the bed with her and sternly faces him in order to start conversation.]

Judith: Listen, I've been thinking... Penny really regretted telling about it along with her feeling bad about having hid it from us for those months.

Patrick: [Sighs] I shouldn't have yelled. She didn't deserve to be treated like that.

Judith: Hey, it's okay. Just... try to make up with her soon. You know she's trying her best on everything.

Patrick: I know. But it's not... it's not her who I'm angry at.

Judith: Oh please, Patrick-

Patrick: No, I'm being serious. What was that hairball of a Nicole thinking when she let Penny witness such an impact-making disaster. Only to force her to keep it a 'secret' afterwards.

Judith: I'm afraid you're taking it way harsher than it actually is, Patrick. From what I've heard from Penny, it's an actual sickness she suffers from.

Patrick: But again, our daughter told she *'forgot'* her medication. How, Judith, how can you forget something like that...

Judith: Oh come on, she's just a person like us. Everyone forgets

things and I doubt she has any bad intentions on purpose. Besides, we're talking about Nicole, you know?

Patrick: Well *that* is exactly the issue! What do you mean 'no bad intentions on purpose'? That cat is one of the main drives for that family's destructiveness! And have you really forgotten... really forgotten...

Judith: Forgotten what?

Patrick: That she *murdered* individuals!

Judith: I-

Patrick: *Stop* defending her, Judith! I'm so confused by how she hasn't been locked behind bars yet. I know this town is colourful, *everybody's weird like you and me*, blah blah blah, all that... But there's no place for a murderer here.

Judith: I get what you're saying. But I refuse to think she hasn't been punished for her actions. And what do you think they'd do? Lock her up for the rest of her life? She'd go insane by that for sure.

Patrick: Pff, she's *already* insane enough with that said.

[Judith lowers her head and feels slightly disappointed by not knowing what to say anymore... She doesn't hate Nicole at all, despite everything she's responsible for. But a part of her knows her husband is right. Patrick's frown gets deeper as he gets up with crossed arms and starts taking frustrated steps.]

Patrick: Look, what really enrages me here is the fact she brought our daughter into potential danger. *Our daughter*, Judith. I'm actually quite surprised of how calmly you're dealing with it.

Judith: I'm not that emotional like you, dear.

Patrick: Don't call me emotional! You don't see me crying, right?!

Judith: [Sighs and speaks with a rather sarcastic tone] Anger is an emotion too, Patrick.

[Patrick only gives his wife a furious glare in response and doesn't move.]

Judith: The least we can do is make Nicole aware of the issue in order to let her learn it wasn't acceptable.

Patrick: Oh, I think she's aware of it! That's the goshdarn problem! I feel sick by the thought of our daughter having stayed there multiple times... I knew she was already out to manipulate her. With Gumball being the disappointing kid he is, it's no wonder why she started getting so obsessive over Penny, only to keep her as her son's girlfriend. [Mimicking Nicole's voice] "You can stay as much with us as you like, Penny"... It's MESSED UP!

[Judith rubs her eyes while sighing in frustration and holds her hands together, only to keep staring at her husband, who seems like acting as if a war started.]

Patrick: I can't take it anymore. I simply can't. I do not want Penny to interact with that boy any longer.

Judith: Because of what... his *mother*? Goshdarnit Patrick, the kid has nothing to do with Nicole's behaviour. Besides, you'd break Penny's heart with that.

Patrick: She'll thank me in the future when she realizes she could've been deceased otherwise.

Judith: Decea-... *What*?!

Patrick: She could've been killed, for the hundredth time! KILLED!

[Judith jumps up and holds her husband's shoulders still, only to try calming him down.]

Judith: Our daughter. Is. Fine. Like I said, and I will repeat myself again, the least we can do is address it to Nicole and receive her understanding.

[Patrick goes quiet and this makes Judith think she managed lowering his tone, but him suddenly frowning again indicates she's incorrect. Patrick gets his wife's arms off his shoulders and takes a

stern step forward, only to freeze and make one last comment.]

Patrick: Did you... Did you know that cat during high school?

Judith: I- I did, but-

Patrick: [Scoffs] No wonder why you're so defensive. Looks like she manipulated you too.

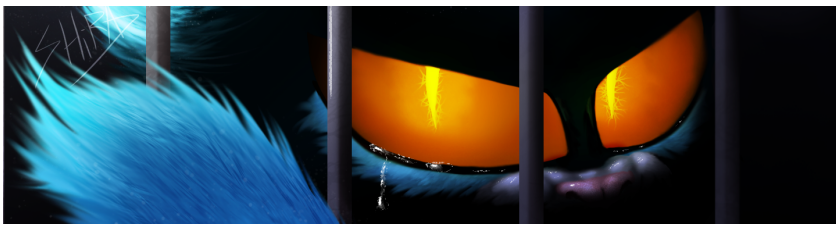
[Patrick exits the room while letting the door shut loudly behind him as he makes his way downstairs. Judith, despite just having claimed she isn't too emotional, bursts into tears by all the sudden tension she didn't expect. It's true that she doesn't hate Nicole. But she feels extremely guilty for not having been able to convince her husband the truth. *Nicole would never have any bad intentions on purpose... Right?* She covers her face with her hands as she sits back down on the bed. The fact she feels like doubting her own thoughts only makes her more confused. It even makes her think she might not have cared enough about Penny... Of course it was an extremely dangerous situation! Of course it has to be addressed! Of course they have to be... careful.

Judith doesn't know what to think anymore. She has always been one with lots of pity towards almost everyone she trusts. But now she isn't so sure if she can trust Nicole... Not anymore. Will she manage to get herself together for the parent gathering tonight? She'll sure try her best. Then suddenly, Polly managed to make her way to her parent's bedroom door by herself and knocks on it. Judith gets up in a rush while wiping away her tears and sniffing her nose, only to open it up for her youngest daughter. Once Polly sees her mother, she runs towards her and jumps while waving her arms in the air. The taller shelled fairy gets the signals and gently picks up Polly while giving the small peanut a kiss on the head.]

Polly: You okie, Mommy?

Judith: Yes sweetie, Mommy's fine.

Chapter 5 - Don't shoot



8.30PM

[The hallway lights at Elmore Jr. High are so dimmed, that it seems like midnight has already arrived, despite the sun only just starting to set. Every parent and parent couple started taking turns in having individual conversations with Principal Brown some minutes ago and, not surprisingly enough, the Watterson couple are one of the first to have their turn. Richard shyly steps into Brown's office with him still not being keen on visiting school, only for Nicole to carefully close the door once she followed her husband inside. How Principal Brown was adjusting and cleaning his glasses earlier, he now sits straight on his desk chair with his hands folded together and two prints in front of him. Nicole's heart starts racing as she fears her sons had gotten into the same shenanigans as a year ago and she tries her best to look neutral, despite her ears lowering out of a sudden. Richard, on the other hand, isn't too worried about the papers at all and keeps staring at his wife from the corner of his eye instead, clearly being more concerned about her.]

Principal Brown: Now, Wattersons, I first of all would like to thank you for once again managing to be on time for the parent gathering.

Nicole: [Nervously chuckles] We tried to keep straying from leaving too late like we used to.

Principal Brown: Hah, I get that. But now to quickly get on topic...

[Brown turns the two papers around and slowly shoves them closer towards Nicole for her to see. But it gets a rather surprised reaction out of her once generically good grades are visible on both prints.

Nicole's ears rise to on top of her head again.]

Principal Brown: Not so bad, right?

Nicole: I... Woah... This is something new...

Principal Brown: I was honestly just as surprised as you, but you might as well praise the two boys for it. Now, don't mind me asking out of curiosity, but what did you do to get them so motivated out of a sudden? Gumball even managed to catch a B minus for Literature!

Nicole: Gosh... I- I don't know to be honest. I actually kind of started to let them organize things on their own, as I haven't been really able to constantly monitor them. Maybe they started realizing it by themselves? That they go to school for a reason?

Principal Brown: [Laughs] Well then you might need to ask them yourself. In any way, I'm extremely proud of them, Mrs. Watterson. I hope you are too.

Nicole: Of course I am! I'm still so... baffled... You know what, I need to call them right after this!

[Principal Brown smiles widely at both Nicole and Richard, even though the bunny kept himself respectfully silent all the time. Richard tries his best to think about what possibly could have helped as well, but doesn't manage to come up with anything. Some generic education-related topics form the very next minutes of the Wattersons' conversation, before their time is up and they leave the principal's office again. Once both Nicole and Richard have the door shut behind them, Nicole chuckles out of joy while grabbing her phone. While waiting for Gumball to pick up as she calls, Richard can only smile by her excited whispering.]

Nicole: Our Gummypuss and Guppy completely nailed it!

Gumball: Mom?

[Nicole quickly turns her head away once she hears her older son's voice at the other side of the line and her smile only widens.]

Nicole: Hey honey, guess what?

Gumball: Hmm, what?

Nicole: Why haven't you and Darwin told about those amazing grades you've been getting at school?!

Gumball: [Chuckles awkwardly] Oh... *those*. Well uhm, we thought about not wanting to bother you with them.

Nicole: Pffsh, you know you can always tell me stuff like that! All I can say I'm so proud of you two! Have you guys been hypnotized by Anais or something?

Gumball: [Laughs] No, Mom. We just... felt like doing more our best... There hasn't been much of lifeless distraction going around, you know?

Nicole: What do you mean?

Gumball: I... I don't really know how to explain it... But, yeah, we just wanted to make you happy I guess.

Nicole: But, dear, you know you don't have to do it for *me*, right? I-I mean, this sure nicely surprised me, but I'd have been proud anyway. I know you still try your best.

Gumball: Yeah, but... I can understand it's kind of embarrassing to have two failing goofballs as sons.

[Nicole's smile then disappears for real as her shoulders and head lower themselves.]

Nicole: What? Failing? You're not failing, honey. You never were, neither of you two. B-besides, why are you worried about me?

Gumball: [With a now quavering voice] I j-just... want you to feel well again. I'm so sorry, Mom. This year made such a big impact and made me realize I've been so tiring for you.

[Nicole feels her heart slowly breaking by these words and wishes she weren't so overexcited before as she leans with her back against

the wall.]

Nicole: Oh, honey... Please... You have never been tiring to me. Even though you know my life is very complicated, it has never been on you. Not at all. I'm so sorry you have to witness it all, but I do not want it to influence your life.

Gumball: I-... I know you only wish the best for me, but... It's so hard for me to let go of how much of a fool I've been.

Nicole: Gumball, please stop. You weren't a fool. It's part of growing up, yet you've grown so much without you realizing it yourself.

[Gumball goes quiet at the other side of the line and tears start evolving in both cats' eyes.]

Nicole: Look, the fact you're able to see that you were different some time ago already means you've learned something good. And you should be proud of that. Just... take my words that it took *me* years before I realized my own growth as a person. I remember being so intensively disappointed in myself. But you know why I cut out with that? Because I saw no use in crying about something that isn't changeable at all. Instead, I decided to focus on the future and all greatness that still can be reached. And you know who taught me that?

[Gumball sniffs his nose and gulps.]

Gumball: W-who?

Nicole: [Slightly smiling] Your father. [Whispering] *Now take it for granted that he has grown a LOT as well.*

Gumball: [Chuckles while wiping away his tears] Y-yeah... Y-you're right, Mom. I too should start focusing on the future, there's no use in crying about the past. Thank you.

Nicole: [Sighs in relief] You're more than welcome, honey. Now feel free to open that cheesecake in the fridge to share with your brother, you definitely deserved it.

Gumball: Oh sweet! Thanks so much again, Mom!

Nicole: [Chuckles] Now, I'll see you tonight. I expect to be home soon as there aren't too many parents I'd like to speak right now.

Gumball: Take your time, Mom. Don't stress.

Nicole: Well I don't want you to be in bed late either. Watch the time, Gummypuss.

Gumball: Yes, ma'am.

Nicole: Alrighty. See you later!

Gumball: See ya!

[Nicole wiping away her tears only leaves Richard with a questioning expression on his face, but his wife telling him it's nothing to be worried about results in him letting it slide. The two now make their way to the library, where tall tables are set up with drinks and small bites, which immediately got Richard's attention. Nicole nervously looks around in case she'd spot certain rainbow silhouettes, but the Wilsons seem to be absent. When she lets Richard chatter with Rocky, who appeared to be the only one the bunny felt comfortable talking to, she makes her way back to the entrance while wanting to check one more time if at least Jackie were at school.

Once she made her way through the doors, without even having touched any of the set up drinks, she finds herself in nothing but the rather dark corridors. Starting to feel a bit uneasy, she decides on turning around, but only sees her path getting blocked by a very tall silhouette. Immediately recognizing the big antlers, Nicole can only conclude Patrick approaches her. She nervously takes a step back, her unconsciousness knowing more than herself, but forces to stay put.]

Nicole: Patrick?

Patrick: Greetings, Nicole. Can I... speak to you really quick... in

private?

[Nicole gulps as it's been a while since she felt this nervous and her heart starts beating faster as she has a slight tremble in her voice.]

Nicole: O-oh, s-sure.

[Patrick's expression is dark and doesn't change a single bit when he sternly turns sideways, in order to make his way to the literature classrooms. Nicole uneasily follows, despite her intuition desperately trying to make her hesitate, and faces the shelled fairy once he kept still in front of some lockers. With no one being around or even close, Patrick crosses his arms while having a frown on his face and intimidatingly bends forward, only for Nicole to cower a slight bit by this.]

Nicole: So... How can I help you?

Patrick: Listen, don't act all innocent now. Quite much of an issue has been going on, which I only got to know about yesterday... despite it having happened months ago.

Nicole: W-what do you mean?

Patrick: [Speaks with gritted teeth] *You got my daughter involved into something she shouldn't have, didn't you?*

Nicole: Oh... She... told you?

Patrick: Bet she did. I can't believe you forced her to keep it a secret. And please, *killing people* and *hiding it*? Nicole, what game are you playing?

Nicole: Oh boy... Here we go...

Patrick: I'm disgusted by what Penny told me, cat! How would you feel if you could've potentially lost one of your kids?!

Nicole: Nothing happened, Patrick...

Patrick: Well, Penny seemed extremely affected and distressed about it! Besides, I've only just had our parental conversation with

the principal, and she's been getting far behind schedule! Both you and I know well how unusual that is for her.

Nicole: I- I'm sorry to hear that...

Patrick: You *should* be! I would ask you for an apology right away, but that won't be able to fix all the damage you already made.

Nicole: What?! Penny knows I apologized to her! I even told her not to worry about me...

Patrick: That's the most foolish thing to tell her! I thought you knew her well... Besides, I can't get over the fact you dirtily *manipulated* her...

Nicole: Another what?! Why would I ever-... Why... would I manipulate her? I d-don't get what you're saying...

Patrick: There's a lot you don't get. Especially the fact you've been overly lucky the past months.

[Nicole's eyes widen and her shoulders lower themselves as her nose twitches for a second.]

Patrick: I remember that incident at Elmore Shopping, Nicole... That wasn't fun to see at all... And if Penny is correct about the fact this 'condition' of yours only worsened, I'm not sure if I can trust you with letting her come over any longer.

Nicole: Y-you're gonna restrict her from coming?

Patrick: Unless I would want to *lose* my older daughter.

Nicole: That's ridiculous! You'll break both Penny and Gumball's hearts!

Patrick: Ugh, you sound just like my wife. It's for their own good.

Nicole: To just... separate them from each other?! You monster!

Patrick: Speak for yourself.

[Nicole's pupils constrict by only just realizing the mental damage that's getting made by those words and she straightens her back as anger starts rising from within her.]

Nicole: Look, I don't think you understand a single bit of how my condition actually functions and instead of doing some investigation in it, you decide to throw with straight up assumptions. I have proper medication to take care of it and haven't had a single episode the past half year. So I can assure you your daughter is completely safe with me. Besides, if she's worried, she can talk to me about it and I can make her realize it's not something that should keep her up at night.

Patrick: Such sweet talk from an individual who ended actual lives...

Nicole: [Baring a fang] Why won't you listen?! Do you really think I chose this?! That I enjoy all of this?! It's gruelling, Patrick... I've *seen* my family cower, I've seen them sob and run away from me... I *know* how bad it is, yet I've been working so hard to improve myself!

Patrick: I'm not falling for that. If you think I'm not seeing what you're actually up to, you're in the complete wrong.

[Nicole squeezes her eyes to slits and tilts her head in absolute confusion and frustration. She takes a big step forward and bares her teeth.]

Nicole: What in the what are you actually thinking?... Talk to me, Patrick. Who am I... according to you?

[Patrick didn't expect Nicole to suddenly revive from her shy bubble and starts feeling slightly nervous by her bared teeth.]

Patrick: Your teenage anger issues, your parents blocking you from getting into contact with certain friends, your destructive 'accidents'... I can only conclude a straight up psycho is currently standing in front of me, if you really want my literal words.

[Nicole can't believe it, but Patrick suddenly mentioning her parents

from during her childhood triggers something bad within her. She doesn't know why it affected her so much, despite the way he actually insulted her, but grabs his arm out of reflex.]

Nicole: [Speaking in a slightly deeper voice] ***You're calling me manipulative, but have you ever considered where those messed up assumptions of yours come from?!***

[Even though Nicole seems like clear rage from top to toe on the outside, deep down she starts getting extremely concerned about the fact something isn't happening the way it should... Her mind doesn't even get the chance to process this, as she suddenly starts trembling a bit while the fur on her back rises.]

Patrick: [Speaks with gritted teeth] *Get your paws off me.*

[Nicole doesn't move and keeps staring thoroughly into his eyes through his shell, only to feel his nervousness grow.]

Patrick: *Get. Away. From me.*

[Nicole doesn't manage to think of any more words and completely gives up on trying to stay stable. Her muzzle wrinkles heavier and a low hiss gets released from in between her teeth. This causes Patrick to lose his stableness as well, as his nerves start getting the best of him. He aggressively pulls his arm loose from Nicole's grip and gives her a slight push to make his point clear. But his push unfortunately reaches the blue feline too harshly due to him not fully controlling his strength, and her rage only grows by this. She once again grabs hold onto the same arm and her claws unsheathe in the process, only getting stuck and the shelled fairy yowls in pain.

He then suddenly grabs hold onto his side with his free arm and reveals a shiny handgun, immediately being recognized by Nicole as a revolver. Being entirely surprised by now getting to know he had one with him all along, and realizing he came well prepared for disaster, she quickly blinks a few times when her mind feels more like hers again. She slightly snaps out of her uncontrolled behaviour and raises her head to sternly look at him. Starting to feel threatened as well, she has no choice but speaking up now as he

keeps the gun on the same level as her face.]

Nicole: [Speaking with gritted teeth] *How long have you owned one of those...?*

Patrick: That's none of your concern. I knew you'd attempt something like this, so better be safe than sorry.

Nicole: Get. It. Away from my head.

Patrick: Not until you release my arm.

Nicole: I'm being serious. Lower. Your. Hand. Now.

Patrick: Again, release my arm first!

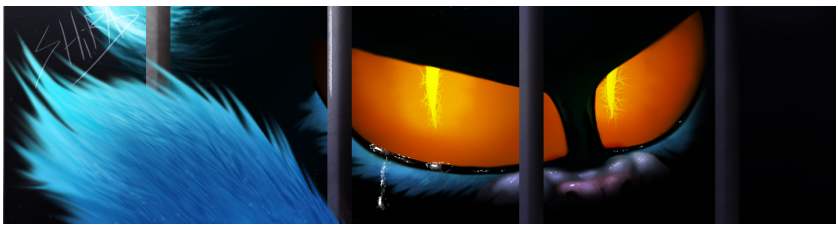
Nicole: How am I supposed to trust you into not pulling the trigger anyway?!

Patrick: I'm no murderer like you. Now obey.

[Nicole can't handle it any longer as bad memories hit her another time by his words. Feeling her thoughts getting shattered by the dark abyss of her fury and savagery, she only tightens her clawed grip onto Patrick's arm. This causes him to suddenly tense his muscles by the increasing agony and he drops the gun. He, having enough, pushes her head down with his other arm and releases the first one from her grip again, only to immediately throw it in the air and prepare for a strike.

Patrick's frown gets deeper and he grits his teeth in fury when he crashes his clenched fist into the blue feline, punching her straight in her stomach. She, clearly having gotten hit in an extremely sensitive spot, gags and collapses on the floor while catching herself with her paws. She takes deep breaths while panting and Patrick gets the chance to get himself together again. Patrick feels slightly guilty when he sees blood starting to run down from Nicole's mouth as he clearly punched her too hard. He slowly walks closer while still feeling quite alarmed and his shoulders lower in grief. He didn't mean to do this...

Chapter 6 - Blood



[Nicole, only having slightly recovered from her former constant aches, doesn't see any hope for her body to strengthen itself any longer as she only starts trembling heavier, while barely being able to prevent her upper body from hitting the floor. She's sitting on her knees with her arms spread in front of her to keep support as she wanted to try getting up again. But this plan completely shatters when more blood starts rising up in her throat and she has no choice but to spit it all out. How blood only dripped from her mouth first, it now floods from her jaws in heavy amounts, and soon enough, remains of a known plant can be recognized in the red puddle.

The blue feline's eyes widen in fear when she realizes it's the Arthrus she took in shortly after dinner, with it not having had the chance to get into her veins. After spitting out one last gallon of blood, she raises her head to look at the shelled fairy in front of her and her voice has turned terrifically raspy.]

Nicole: [Coughs] *How DARE YOU... **PUNCH A WOMAN!***

[Patrick stares at her with both a shameful and slightly disgusted expression, as her mouth and jaw are drenched in blood. Fear starts welling up by her yelling and he slowly picks up his revolver, which was laying on the floor. Nicole's ears can't lower themselves any further or Patrick continues approaching her while having a finger on the trigger.]

Nicole: What are you gonna do to me...? *Wasn't this... enough?!*

Patrick: No, please! I... I'm so sorry. I really didn't mean-

Nicole: **OH PLEASE! JUST-**

[Nicole lets out a harsh cough while letting her head hang for a second, only to then raise it again and growl sharply.]

Nicole: **-SHUT UP ALREADY!**

[Patrick freezes in his steps and is about to put away his gun again, but hesitates when he notices...

... the blue feline's fur getting rougher and longer. Nicole only has to gaze one more time at the bloody pieces of Arthrus leaves in front of her to feel doomed. Her heartbeat increases its speed, even though it already was close to reaching its limit. But now both her body and mind have once again reached it... *The limit.* The cat's trembling causes her to feel nothing but fear as tears start forming in her eyes. It's been half a year... No matter how badly she doesn't want to get used to it, she actually wished she had enough tolerance to handle this agony. But this isn't another meltdown like she used to have years ago. It's not plain rage she eventually started to use. It's the Upper Limit growing stronger every time a trigger occurs. With every time her eyes start glowing and her fangs elongate, it only feeds itself on the cat's powerlessness as she gives in to the dark side...

Patrick's eyes widen when he sees huge rips evolving in Nicole's uniform as her entire body grows, together with her six long and sharp fangs. She clenches her clawed paws into fists and groans loudly in anguish once her spine crackles and skeletal structure shifts. It's almost as if her joints are breaking, due to the terrifyingly painful sounds, and the shelled fairy can't process what's occurring in front of him. *Is this what Penny saw?*, he restlessly thinks.

Nicole's tail slightly twists itself a few times out of agony and she struggles with getting up again. Luckily for her, her stomach quickly heals itself and she receives the power to move her paws by this. Patrick is still frozen in his steps as his astonishment can't even be beaten by his upwelling fear. The now eight feet monstrous feline towers above him once she gets up and barely watches out for the ceiling, resulting in accidentally bumping her head into it. While aggressively shaking her head and snarling a few times in the

air, the blue monster focuses its vision on her attacker's silhouette in front of her. She lowers her upper body and lets her front paws touch the floor, slowly getting on all fours, and cracks her neck that formerly got stiff.

Patrick gasps in terror when he sees the now exposed, large teeth getting closer and finally decides to take a step backwards. Nicole suddenly narrows her glowing yellow eyes once her pain faded and the usual insanity took over her mind. She starts growling viciously once she notices the shiny revolver still being in Patrick's hand and takes a powerful jump forward, immediately capturing the shelled fairy in between her arms and some lockers from the other side of the corridor.]

Patrick: *My goodness...*

[Nicole's pupils narrow more till two glowing slits and her muzzle only wrinkles heavier. It's time for Patrick to actually freak out when the blue predator starts drooling, *right in front of him!* She suddenly tries to grab him below his head, where his neck is supposed to be, and her claws dig deep into his shell. Afraid she could actually break it, Patrick quickly wraps his hands around the gigantic, clawed paw and desperately tries to push it away with all his might. Him being able to get it a few inches away from him causes Nicole to lose her patience and she wants nothing but sinking her teeth into the still mysterious substance his shell is made of.

When the blue feline enragedly snarls another time and her opened jaws race towards Patrick, he has no choice but to immediately duck and his left antler gets stuck in between the large fangs instead. Not that it specifically hurts, but Patrick still screams it out in fear. At this point he feels hopeless and he once again raises his hand with the gun. He angrily shakes his head and pulls the trigger multiple times, only for roughly four bullets to race through the air and fly past Nicole. The blue feline violently turns her head due to being sensitive for the sudden harsh sound from the gunshots and breaks the shelled fairy's antler in the process. While still holding it in her mouth, Patrick gets up and gasps another time when he realizes he's now out of balance.

Out of blind rage, he fires his gun another time and the shots now seem endless. While kneeling, he keeps his eyes sternly closed and shoots until the gun runs out. Once all bullets got fired, the shelled fairy drops his gun and covers his face with his hands in grief, as he realizes his emotions got the best of him again. But when he gets himself together a bit and gets up while the dust fades, he sees the impossible that leaves him stupefied. Out of all bullets that reached Nicole, none passed her fur. They simply bounced off... *like happened some time ago...*

Nicole takes a big step forward and rises onto her hind legs, this time avoiding to get hit by the ceiling, and lets out a terrific roar that only makes the direct surroundings quake. Patrick screams another time and starts running into the opposite direction as fast as he can, only for the huge feline to give in to the chase. He desperately tries searching for the nearest exit, but has no other option but entering the library, where all parents started gathering earlier.

All parents have had their conversations with Brown at this point and they all seem to be enjoying the evening while chattering with each other. For a change, Richard is actually amused too as he didn't mind spending most of the time with Rocky. But this moment soon gets ruined once Patrick runs through the doors with a broken antler, only to immediately close them behind him and lean against them. Judith is the first one to gasp before the other parents do too, and she rushes towards her ragged up husband who pants in exhaustion.]

Judith: Oh my goodness! What happened to you?!

Patrick: **R-run! Just get out of here! *NOW!***

Judith: What? Why?!

[Patrick doesn't even get the chance to speak up again when he suddenly realizes the library has eight doors instead of four, and a huge silhouette soon enough appears behind the first set. All parents have their attention focused on those doors as soon as Richard drops his soda, Colin and Felix' parents reach for their phones, Felicity stares at Rocky who takes a step back, Judith glares

lifelessly and Patrick slowly turns his head. Without any of them making a sound or daring to breathe properly, a horror-striking deep growl leaves them startled as soon as the huge monstrous feline bursts into the library, only to immediately be recognized by Richard as his wife.]

Richard: Stand back!

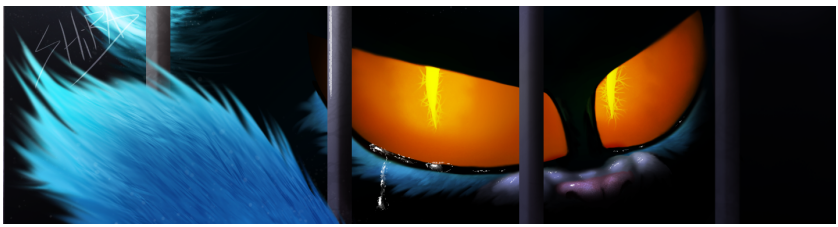
[Richard's voice cracks due to him not having expected that his wife would completely lose it another time. While hoping he still has the same courage as half a year ago, he rushes forward and gets away from the cowering parents, only to wrap his arms around the gigantic cat. Patrick takes his chance to escape and sprints towards Judith, who immediately inspects his broken antler in shock.

Patrick can't even feel his anger completely, how frightened he is. He then suddenly hopes no one had heard his gunshots as soon as his mind becomes a bit clearer again, but is slightly glad he didn't actually kill Nicole. No matter how much he fears her now. What is he supposed to do? He watches in distress how Richard desperately tries to stop his wife from possibly harming the other parents, while almost getting entirely mauled. Judith frowns as soon as she notices nobody helping at all and runs forward, only to grab Nicole's purse which Richard had earlier and dig through it. Richard manages to catch a glimpse of this, but soon realizes the shelled fairy is only trying to find anything useful.]

Richard: DARK GREEN LEAVES!

[The pink bunny screams at the top of his lungs and pants after having caught the transparent package as soon as Judith threw it. He feels a slight bit of relief when he finally manages to keep Nicole's head low and still, and quickly feeds her the handful of Arthrus leaves...

Chapter 7 - A freak



Thursday 11.00AM

[Gumball has never felt as odd before as during this entire morning. The school weirdly gave everyone a day off yesterday without a known or specified reason. Besides, the only other person the blue kitten talked with so far was Darwin and all other pupils seemed to leave him and his brother be. Whenever the Watterson boys would make their way through the corridors, the others kept silent and stared at them with the most uneasy expression as they walked by. Darwin finds it odd too, but tries his best not to think too much about it, as he is glad enough to be with Gumball. The blue kitten then realizes something even more unusual that makes his heart drop. Penny isn't at school.

After lunch break, any more hours of unease is something Gumball really can't use right now. So he decides to immediately dial his girlfriend's number as soon as he returned his tray. Darwin wants to make him aware of the lessons that are about to start, but keeps himself silent when he sees his adoptive brother having such a sickly worried expression on his face.]

Gumball: Penny? A-are you there?

[Penny tries to hide that her voice is a bit raspy, but the blue kitten already finds out she had just been crying.]

Penny: H-hey...

Gumball: Penny, are you alright? Why aren't you at school? You never skip a day like this...

Penny: D-don't worry about me... I just woke up with a fever and didn't feel like following classes for that matter.

Gumball: A fever? That's new. I can't recall any other time you've been sick before.

Penny: [Sighs] Well a first time isn't impossible, is it?!

Gumball: Gee, sorry. I didn't mean to harm you.

Penny: I-it's not your fault, s-sorry Gumball. There's just too much going on right now and I can't-

[Penny goes quiet at the other side of the line out of a sudden.]

Gumball: Penny?

[Gumball's ears drop when he clearly hears her sobbing.]

Gumball: Penny? Please tell me, what's going on?!

Penny: My dad broke his antler Tuesday night...

Gumball: I'm so sorry to hear that...

Penny: He'll regrow it eventually, not that it hurt or something. But, Gumball, things don't really seem to be as good for you either...

Gumball: What? What do you mean with that?

Penny: You d-don't know? Didn't your parents tell you?

Gumball: I have no clue of what I'm supposed to know.

[Darwin gives his brother a sudden punch when he sees Miss Simian approaching from the other side of the cafeteria. Gumball can't even get mad at him for his interruption as he gasps when he sees the tall baboon walking into their direction.]

Gumball: W-wait Penny, one moment, I gotta run to class right now!

[Both the blue kitten and legged goldfish jump up, only to then

start sprinting into the corridors as fast as possible. How Darwin wanted to reach out to the classroom's handle first, he suddenly stops when he sees his adoptive brother stopped in his tracks too. He slowly turns around and walks towards him.]

Darwin: Gumball? Are you coming?

[Gumball feels his entire system tremble by upwelling grief and confusion as he keeps holding his phone tightly in his paw. He stares blankly at the red lockers in front of him with tears evolving in his eyes and slowly raises the phone to his ear again.]

Gumball: P-Penny?... W-what exactly... happened?

Penny: Oh dear... I- I'm not sure if I can discuss that over the phone...

[Gumball sniffs and needs to force himself not to burst into tears when he glances another time at his locker...]

Penny: Gumball? Are you crying?

[Darwin gets closer to stand next to him and gasps when he sees what upset him. Big, bold and black letters sprayed by paint spell out the words *'YOUR MOM IS A FREAK'*, without signature.]

Penny: Please tell me, i-is something wrong?!

Gumball: They all know... T-they all know now...

Penny: ...I'm so sorry.

Gumball: What? W-why would you apologize?

Penny: It's my fault...

Gumball: N-no it isn't! Y-you didn't do anything!

Penny: You don't understand, Gumball! Everything that happened Tuesday was on me! But I refuse to tell you... It's too late anyway... I- I can't-

[Gumball wanted to try reassuring his girlfriend as soon as he heard her voice was just as disrupted by sobbing as his', but she hangs up before he could say another word. The blue kitten feels as if tough thorns are piercing though his throat and he starts sobbing while covering his eyes. Darwin winces and immediately wraps his arms around his engrieved older brother. He'd rather cried too, but knows it now is his turn to help after the many times Gumball returned the favour.]

Darwin: W-we might need to get to-

Gumball: No! I'm *not* heading to class now! I can't take this anymore... Penny feels lost, Mom hasn't spoken to us for an entire day yesterday, nor I got to even *see* her! Something terrible has happened or is going on and here I am, completely unaware!

Darwin: S-snap out of it, bro! I have no clue either, b-but you shouldn't blame it on yourself!

Gumball: I need to talk with Mom immediately. There's no other option and we might already be running out of time!

Darwin: Gumball, please-

[Darwin doesn't get the chance to say anything else as his brother suddenly gets up and starts running towards the exit. Pupils from other classes, who have a different schedule, get out of the blue kitten's way but can't keep their mouths shut. Discouraging chanting and yelling fills the corridors and only increase Gumball's tears as he wants nothing more than getting away. *They all know now... They all do...*

"Hey cat! Signed the adoption papers yet?!"

"Do you need a subscription for Animal Control?!"]

Darwin: STOP IT YOU ALL!

[Darwin's voice heartbrokenly cracks as he runs after his brother and pushes everyone in his path aside without wanting to listen to their mocking claims any longer. Being too focused on wanting to reassure the kitten causes him not to give up when the claims

change their subject into him.

"How does it feel to be the least feral in the family now?!"

"Pick the ocean if you want to live!"

...

12.00PM

Not much of an enjoyable atmosphere is present in the Wattersons house, despite not all of them being home. Anais locked herself in her room as she didn't want to interfere in anything that is currently going on and even though she has a day off due to her main teacher being ill, she can't enjoy a single bit of it. Seeing her mother's purse at the entrance of the door was already enough for her to feel alarmed as soon as she had woken up. She hadn't gone to work again...]

Nicole: I SWEAR TO YOU THAT I TOOK IT IN!

[Nicole's yelling fills the parents' bedroom with unease and Richard can't decide whether he feels threatened or frustrated as well. Her fury already started to rise, even though she only just woke up. The pink bunny is sitting on the bed with his paws nervously folded together as he keeps his head low and ears drooped while timidly staring at his outraged wife. She takes stern steps as she wanders in circles in front of him and the way she can't keep herself stable makes Richard fear she could actually lash out in any second.]

Richard: I believe you did, honey. Please, take it easy.

Nicole: How can I take it easy when he straight up PROVOKED ME?!

Richard: I'm begging you to calm down... I already tried to prove that I trust you, but you need to understand it was distressing for me too.

Nicole: [Snorts] OH I KNOW IT WAS! No need to prove *that* to me! That is exactly the issue, Richard. How am I supposed to stay stable for a longer amount of time if someone literally BREAKS IT!

Richard: It was just too unfortunate... But the fact Patrick knew about it confuses me.

[Nicole keeps still in her tracks and speaks with her back faced to her husband.]

Nicole: Penny told him.

[Richard gulps and turns his head away as if he expects to get another wave of shouting. But he relaxes a bit again when he sees her hunching a bit. Nicole turns around.]

Nicole: Which is... a completely understandable consequence now I think about it... [Sighs] It's all my own fault, Richard. If that one night didn't occur, neither of the girls would've gotten involved nor would it have struck worry into their parents...

Richard: So... What are you going to do about it? Y-you know you can't change the past...

Nicole: I- I know... But I hope Patrick did learn his lesson now.

Richard: What?

Nicole: I- I mean... I probably won't have a choice but apologizing to him, but let him realize soon that it wasn't my intention.

[Richard gives her a terrified glare and this only makes her feel guilty about her tone earlier, as she hunches her shoulders with a low tail.]

Nicole: I'm... I'm sorry. I shouldn't have lashed out to you like that.

Richard: It's alright, honey. Maybe you should do something to get your mind off it now. You've been exhausted yesterday.

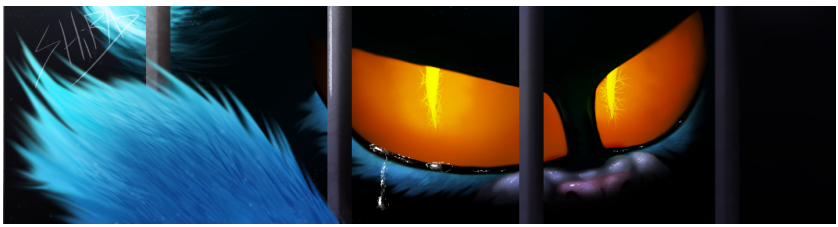
[Nicole nods and makes her way to the bathroom without saying another word, going to freshen herself up.

It's only an hour later when Nicole is settled at the kitchen counter with a cup of coffee in front of her and her phone in her paw. She calmly checks if anything special happened, but not a single

notification seems to excite her at all. The blue feline decides on another sip and raises the cup to her snout, only to immediately need to force herself from dropping it as soon as the front door suddenly swings open. She winces from the cup's heat and tries to get herself together when her oldest son runs up to her, with tears streaming down his cheeks. Not having expected her son's extremely grieved mood, she straight up opens her arms for him to sob into her shirt. She briefly glances at the staircase, where Darwin disappears upstairs without saying a single word, just as heartbroken as well. Nicole's pupils enlarge when she gently grabs her son's head by the cheeks and looks him in the eye. His eyes are extremely reddened, indicating he has been crying for a long time now, but he doesn't seem to run out of tears anytime soon. The blue feline takes her kitten on her lap and calmly lets him explain what happened...]

Gumball: T-they all know now...

Chapter 8 - Doubt



[Nicole doesn't know how to react on what her son just told her. He stared at her with reddened eyes by tears which continuously streamed down his cheeks and didn't even manage to speak up properly before running upstairs. He's terrified. That's why he fled. He didn't dare waiting on response from his mother as he felt insecure about what to expect from her.

Has Elmore Jr High lost their mind?, Nicole thinks. She doesn't know whether to feel enraged, endangered or engrieved as she freezes in her steps and keeps staring at the kitchen sink in front of her. Though lots of things happened, everything seemed like it could've been secret as much as possible and not have too many individuals knowing.

But now imaginary pitchforks started to rise among the citizens due to Tuesday's disaster. Not against the entire family, who used to be known for their outlandishness, but no one else than the mother herself. There's no point in thinking about how the past could've been different and the feline already went too far months ago... But she started refusing to think it was completely on her...

She then suddenly clenches her paws into fists and figures she doesn't have any other option but to approach Principal Brown as soon as she can. Scrapping her earlier plan to relax, she gets up, finishes her coffee and packs her purse for the next day.

It's close to becoming evening when the blue feline prepared dinner

and set the table, only for her husband to immediately join as soon as she called him. Anais stays hidden behind the corner of the kitchen's entrance and checks if her mother has calmed down. She almost gasps when she accidentally makes eye contact with her, but soon relaxes when the blue feline smiles broadly at her. The little pink bunny shyly approaches her mother with big pupils and drooped ears, only to immediately get hugged by her. Without saying a word, Anais settles at the table and gets a ruffle through the fur on top of her head from Nicole, before the blue feline walks towards the stairs. Her shoulders suddenly lower when she realizes neither of the boys had shown themselves after they got home earlier today. She really wanted to talk to them earlier, but strongly hesitated by her unstable mind. But now she takes a deep breath and forces herself to go upstairs, after telling Richard and Anais to start dinner without her.

Gumball lies in bed with his face buried in his pillow, clearly being overwhelmed and tired. Darwin is sitting next to the lower bunk, on the carpet floor and with a comic book in his fins. He feels less engrieved than his brother, even though he had be crying as well earlier. Not wanting to bother the blue kitten, he decided to distract himself with reading. The incidents from half a year ago might've been the scariest the legged goldfish had ever experienced, but they made him stronger at the same time. He still remembers the great reassurance his adoptive mother gave him that day and he knows she's trying her best.

But.

Something doesn't feel right. Not at all. What could she have possibly done in order for the Elmore Jr High students to turn their backs onto him and his brother? Darwin feels confused... She promised them all so much... But is she really living up to that? Is it all getting worse? Isn't it over yet?

The little goldfish startles when he sees the door slowly opening in the corner of his eye and he gets up in a rush while backing away. Nicole, with drooped ears and a bent back in shame, makes her way into the room and immediately faces her adoptive son. Darwin can't help bursting into tears as soon as she looks him in the eye. Scratch what he thought about feeling stronger... His inner guppy made him

terrified again.]

Nicole: D-Darwin? What's wrong, dear?

[Nicole grits her teeth as she didn't expect him to suddenly break down and takes a step forward while opening her arms. But Darwin can't take it anymore. He takes a small jump and rushes into the furthest corner of the room, where he hides his face with his fins.]

Nicole: I- I'm telling you, I'm so sorry! Please... don't be scared again...

[Gumball suddenly rises up and his raspy voice indicates he had been sobbing heavily for the most part, which surprises his mother.]

Gumball: What did you do, Mom...?

[Nicole's eyes widen and she turns around to face her oldest son. A cold silence makes their stares uneasy.]

Nicole: Look, I- I've been wanting to t-tell you earlier... But I just couldn't...

Gumball: And why not?

[Nicole takes a deep breath and wants to speak again, but gets interrupted by the blue kitten.]

Gumball: Actually, no, just save it.

Nicole: H-honey? But I-

Gumball: No. You've apologized so many times now... When are you gonna start living up to your promises? ...Now I'm begging you to tell me, what happened on... Tuesday...?

[Nicole holds her head with both paws in frustration as she knows he's speaking the truth. He's right. She apologized so often... but without anything changing. But can she change it?

She frowns and sits down next to Gumball on his bunk, as Darwin slowly manages to get himself together again. She turns her head

away from her son and keeps it low while the corners of her mouth only get lower. With a slight wrinkle in her mildly snarling snout, she sniffs her nose a few times before speaking up again. Her suddenly darkening tone makes Gumball feel slightly guilty about his' earlier.]

Nicole: Listen, son... It was another episode. Both you and I know how those go. But this time, and I'm swearing to you, it wasn't because of a silly mistake like forgetting the Arthrus.

[She raises her head a bit and her now constricted pupils move to the corners of her eyes, looking sternly into Gumball's.]

Nicole: You know... Some people aren't easy to be reasoned with. And some of *those* people go all over the place with assumptions. Too many bad memories were already welling up that evening... and my unstableness simply caused me not being able to take it any longer. I took in the herb, like any other night, but I... spat it out.

Gumball: W-why did y-you-

Nicole: I got punched, Gumball. Attacked. Attacked for being sick...

[Tears start welling up in her eyes.]

Gumball: W-who punched you...?

Nicole: I- I can't-... You'd be heartbroken...

Gumball: It was Patrick, wasn't it?

[The tall feline's eyes widen as she frowns again.]

Nicole: How... do you know that?

Gumball: Penny seemed very upset today when I called her... She wasn't at school and even... hung up on me. She never does that, Mom. I knew something bad was up once she told me her father had broken his antler. Was that...?

Nicole: Yes. I... I tore it off... I just... It was so odd. It's usual for my outbursts to turn into plain chaos like that... but I was blinded.

Blinded more than usually...

Gumball: W-what do you mean?

Nicole: I didn't even feel constant pain all inside my body after transforming like usually is the case. It just... felt like a red mist in front of my eyes... and all I could see were memories I want to forget. As if... they came back to haunt me, just in order to powerfully rage against Patrick. I don't know what it was... But it was so odd...

Gumball: W-will you be able to make up with him though?

Nicole: I... I don't know. He probably hates me even more than he used to already.

Gumball: Would that... by any chance... influence my contact with Penny?

[Nicole's eyebrows rise and she uneasily twitches her ears.]

Nicole: I- I wouldn't allow that. You deserve to see her. I'm so sorry for being the cause of this...

Gumball: Mom, i- it's okay... I apologize for my tone earlier. I didn't know you were attacked.

Nicole: I honestly feel worse for both of you, and Darwin.

[Nicole briefly glares at the eavesdropping goldfish and he slowly dares to approach her when he got aware of the situation.]

Nicole: I'm sorry you're getting bullied because of me.

[Darwin sits down next to Gumball and both boys stare at their mother with a defeated expression. Nicole suddenly gets up and crosses her arms.]

Nicole: Look, I'm gonna fix this. I'm planning to have a serious talk with your principal tomorrow as I find this extremely unacceptable. Just... you two make sure you're keeping your head up.

[Darwin nods, still not daring to say anything, and Gumball gets up in a rush. He wraps his arms around his mother, giving her a tight hug and she smiles for a brief second before doing the same.]

Gumball: Please get better soon, Mom. I don't want you to be sick.

Nicole: I'll try... at least. Though you need to understand this condition is chronic, alright?

Gumball: Wait... so... y-you'll never get cured?

Nicole: I-...

[One glance at both her vulnerable sons is enough to make her feel guilty for their worry and she can't help but bending the truth by far as she knows it.]

Nicole: I will find a cure. This will be gone... soon.

Gumball: Y-you're sure?

Nicole: I am.

[*What am I doing?*, she restlessly thinks. *I don't even know if there's a cure! Why lie to them?!*

But I just... don't want to hurt them with the truth, do I?

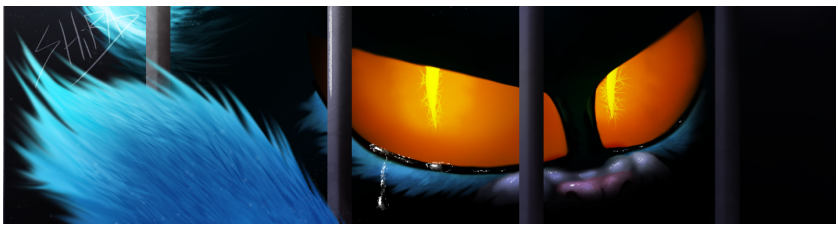
Darwin suddenly joins in the hug as well as he clearly snapped out of his hesitation now. Nicole is at least glad she's able to reason with them after every disaster. She can't be any more grateful for the four Wattersons that never left her side. While she first felt insecure about whether they'd stay supportive or not after revealing her sickness, she now knows she can count on them.

But this only makes her feel guiltier. She now told the boys she'd find a cure for it. A way to end it all for good. But the fact she doesn't know anything for sure makes her nervous. What if there is no cure? What if it all only gets worse? Will she have no choice but leaving them behind?]

Richard: Hey you three? Are you coming?! Dinner's getting cold!

[Richard's yelling from the bottom of the stairs snaps Nicole out of her thoughts and she takes the two boys with her downstairs...

Chapter 9 - Defense



Friday 3.00PM - Elmore Jr High

[Dark clouds did not help with improving the day's mood, despite there not being any rain. However, Gumball and Darwin were very excited for summer holiday and the usually occurring sunny weather. But now there's nothing that can snap them out of their nervousness, even though there's only one week of school left for them...]

Gumball: Y-you decided to come along?

[Gumball tries his best to keep the volume of his voice as low as possible, due to him not wanting anyone to possibly eavesdrop. The blue kitten and legged goldfish timidly follow their (adoptive) mother through the hallways. As students start leaving their classrooms, more individuals get surprised by the sudden appearance of the feline mother in the school again, despite still remembering the stories. Nicole doesn't even look behind or around her as she keeps taking stern steps, while the approaching students avoid her with big arcs.]

Nicole: I told you I was gonna have a talk with Principal Brown. There's no problem with me doing that once I pick you up from school, right?

Gumball: N-no, but w-what about the other kids?

Nicole: What about them?

[The three then walk past the silhouette of a tyrannosaurus and a

small minotaur creature. They both give the Watterson boys sinister glares, but before either of them can take a step forward, Nicole stops dead in her tracks.]

Tina: Hey fluff face, asked your mom to help defending you?!

[Jamie bursts into laughter, but doesn't notice the tall blue feline suddenly standing in front of them as Tina's grin disappears.]

Jamie: [Chuckles] Yeah! What are you gonna do, send her aft-

Nicole: Finish that sentence, I dare you.

[Jamie drops silent as she opens her eyes again and sees a furious feline giving her a death glare. The minotaur, immediately getting desperate to defend herself, tenses her shoulders and quickly holds up a clenched fist in front of Nicole's face.]

Jamie: W-whatever you do, this fist isn't making a j-joke!

[Nicole's expression doesn't change any bit as she appears deadly frozen in her pose and slowly wraps her paw around the minotaur's wrist. She gently pulls the fist down and her narrowing eyes are the only parts of her visibly moving.]

Nicole: *My sons constantly getting beaten up by you makes that clear, yeah.*

Jamie: B-but-

Nicole: [With gritted teeth] Pick a fight with someone else, kiddo.

[Before Jamie can even violently release her arm or make any other possible moves, Nicole heavily tightens her paw's grip on the little culprit's wrist; very quick and harshly, until a brief crack can be heard. Jamie screams it out and feels tears flowing down her cheeks for the first time in a long while. Both Gumball and Darwin gasp in shock, Tina flees in fear, leaving her friend behind who now is stuck with a sprained wrist.]

Jamie: [While sobbing and panting] H-how could y-you do this?! Y-you're gonna g-get in so m-much trouble for t-this!

[The blue kitten and legged goldfish take a big step backwards, away from the scene as they can almost feel Nicole's raged energy radiating around her, despite her pose still seeming very passive. The tall blue feline passive-aggressively smirks and exposes her teeth while leaning a bit forward to look the minotaur in the eye.]

Nicole: Oh honey, I've already gotten into enough trouble. Now, it's your turn to run to your mommy.

[Jamie wants to frown, but cold fear runs through her veins when Nicole intimidatingly snaps her jaws closed inches away from her, biting in thin air and resulting in the minotaur to flee as well. The feline mother knocks imaginary dust off her shoulders while turning around and facing her sons with a sudden, warm smile. The two did not expect this and doubt whether they should trust it. But as soon as she gently takes them by the paw and fin while continuing their pace, they firstly feel nothing but awe.]

Gumball: Woah, Mom, you really showed her.

Nicole: Meh, it was just a matter of the right timing. I've been wanting to confront her about her violent bullying earlier, but never really had the opportunity.

Darwin: B-but, Mrs. Mom, about what she said earlier; aren't you for real gonna get in trouble again?

Nicole: It was nothing but a sprain in the wrist, the nurse should be able to help her enough. Besides, there's literally nothing she or her family can do to me. [Whispers] *Just pretend I'm a crazy person.*

[Her chuckling made Gumball and Darwin feel less stressed about what just happened, even though they fear Jamie could ever get back at them for it.]

Gumball: What if she wants to avenge herself though?

Nicole: Just gimme a call if that's the case, sweetie. Mom knows how to deal with it.

[How Gumball first felt thankful, he now feels fear getting struck into his mind as soon as he notices Nicole having another sudden

toothy grin on her snout. He tries to stare into her eyes while they walk and as soon as the tall feline noticed her son giving her a concerning glare, she turns her head and her grin disappears.]

Nicole: Something... wrong?

Gumball: I- uhm... I just hope you're feeling alright, Mom. I'm not used to seeing you so confident like that anymore.

Nicole: Oh, honey. Just don't worry about me, okay?

Gumball: Sure, but... how come you're suddenly so chill with everything?

[Nicole can't help but chuckling again, which concerns Gumball and Darwin even more. They now both stare into her eyes and notice her pupils restlessly constricting.]

Gumball: Are you s-sure that you're feeling alright?

Nicole: [Chuckles] I'm fine!

Gumball: T-then how did you suddenly become so... freakily mirthful?

[Nicole goes silent for a brief moment and lowers her head to look her oldest son in the eye with a wide smile, that now exposes all of her six fangs.]

Nicole: I don't know.

[Gumball's eyes widen as he now feels freaked out by her slightly lunatic expression and turns to Darwin. Nicole's smile disappears as soon as she feels something odd rushing through her out of a sudden. She doesn't know what it was, but it managed to get her emotions more neutral again and she even feels her guilt about past disasters rise again.

This is unusual.

This isn't an occasional 'mood swing' she used to have. Nothing even hurt and she took in the Arthrus during breakfast. Why did she

laugh? Why did she laugh when her son seemed genuinely concerned? *Is it true what they all say... that one can lose their sanity if they've been exposed to power*, Nicole thinks. *I'm not powerful... I'm sick... Heavily sick... and weak... Right?*

As soon as Gumball's fear sunk a bit, he snaps his fingers to bring his mother back to earth again who clearly zoned out for a full minute. She shakes her head and rubs her eyes while keeping a bit of distance from her sons. Once she speaks up, her tone sounds more like her own again but darker.]

Nicole: Don't break a leg over it. I'm probably hallucinating or something from the Arthrus.

Gumball: Hallucinating? Was that even one of the side-effects?

[Nicole frowns and sighs.]

Nicole: Probably. Now come on, I don't wanna be late for the appointment with your principal.

Darwin: W-will we be joining?

Nicole: I was actually gonna ask if you two minded waiting on the bench until I return?

Gumball: Not at all. We won't be going anywhere.

[The blue kitten and legged goldfish sit down in silence after their mother nodded at them and nervously watch how she disappears into the principal's office.]

Principal Brown: Greetings, Mrs. Watterson.

[Brown's voice had a slight bit of a tremble, but despite this his overall state seemed very calm as he sits up straight on his desk chair and folds his hands together. Nicole gently closes the door behind her and settles on the chair in front of him with lowering ears in distress.]

Nicole: Good afternoon, Principal. I'm glad this could get sorted out as soon as possible.

Principal Brown: No worries. Now, I first of all would like to apologize for the recent occurrences I've heard about. Both for the huge misunderstanding about Tuesday's incident and the student's unacceptable behaviour towards your sons.

Nicole: I appreciate you're on the right side here. The last thing I want to happen is for my sons to start feeling unsafe anywhere, just because of their sick mother.

Principal Brown: If you don't mind, now we're on the topic, may I ask a few questions about it?

Nicole: [Sighs] It would be shady of me to deny that, since everyone... knows now.

[Principal Brown adjusts his glasses, but his expression seems quite concerned as he genuinely starts feeling a bit bad for the blue feline in front of him. He clears his throat and types something on his computer for a brief moment.]

Principal Brown: I've studied the medical documents you sent me this morning and I can only conclude there still is quite much of insecurity going on, isn't it?

Nicole: T-there is. But I can assure you I'm currently on track of battling it more properly.

Principal Brown: I see. And, regarding specifically Tuesday evening, what is your view on the situation with Mr. Fitzgerald?

Nicole: [Frowns] I... I think... he simply didn't realize what my condition was about.

Principal Brown: Is there any way someone could help with guiding you two to get along again?

Nicole: I'm not sure. I definitely want to apologize, but I first have to regain the strength I'm currently missing if I'm completely honest.

Principal Brown: Understandable. One last question; are you in contact with any form of therapist or psychiatrist for your care?

Nicole: I am. It's just been a long time since my last visit, but now you mention it, I actually have an appointment planned soon.

Principal Brown: When, if I may ask?

[Nicole quickly grabs her phone from her skirt's pocket and opens her calendar application, only to immediately read her set appointment and show it to the principal.]

Nicole: The first Saturday of summer holiday, evening.

[Principal Brown nods respectfully and makes a few more notes on his computer before turning to Nicole again.]

Principal Brown: I first of all don't want you to worry about the school records due to your diagnosis papers still being more than valid. After speaking with the school's insurance, the locker damage should soon be covered as well, so you won't have to think about that any longer.

[Nicole nods gratefully.]

Principal Brown: But I'm sincerely asking you to promise one thing; that you'll be staying in contact with your therapist more often from now on.

Nicole: I promise you I will. It's a complicated and long story why past months had been different, but I've changed my mindset.

Principal Brown: Thank you.

Nicole: No, honestly, thank *you* for your help.

Principal Brown: It's the least a good head of education can do, supporting parents with difficulties besides their children alone.

[Nicole suddenly goes quiet as she sees her vision going slightly blurry and zones out while images of the recent disaster start flashing in front of her eyes. Not having expected this to happen

right now, her limbs tense themselves and her pupils constrict again.

Despite not remembering much besides 'red mist' from Tuesday, she can suddenly see everything clearly. How she violently tried to dig her teeth into Patrick's shell and ended up tearing off one of his antlers instead... How her enraged roar echoed in the dark hallway... How her husband had to sedate her once again on his own with teared up eyes...]

Principal Brown: ...right?

[Brown speaking up again makes Nicole's mind suddenly clear again as she shakes her head. She awkwardly holds on to the back of her neck with one paw while trying her best to force a smile on her face.]

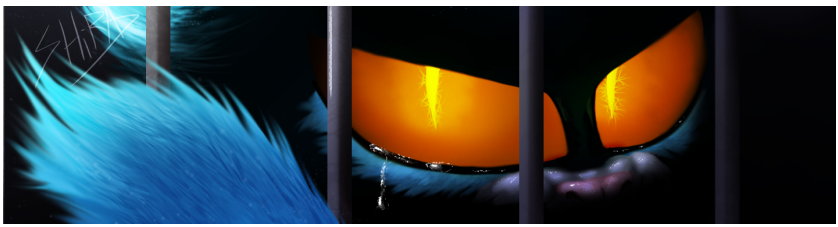
Nicole: Y-yeah, you're right. My apologies, this has been happening since shortly ago.

Principal Brown: Will you be alright?

Nicole: Yes, don't worry about it... I think it's just because I'm currently very tired, which is probably a good reason for me to head home now.

[The principal nods and gets up to lead Nicole to the door, only to open it for her. She grabs her purse and makes her way outside after empathically greeting him. Immediately taking Darwin and Gumball by their paw and fin, the tall blue feline leaves the now completely silent building...

Chapter 10 - Agonizing truth I



[Richard's eyes widen when he enters the bedroom while reading 9PM on the clock. He didn't expect finding his wife laying under the covers already, despite it not being that late yet. The pink bunny carefully approaches her while closing the door behind him and sits down next to her silhouette. Seeing her eyes closed can only let him conclude she fell asleep already. *You still must be extremely tired*, he thinks while slowly moving his paw closer to her shoulder, only to gently caress her back. The leporid's pupils expand when he's able to see her in total rest again. But no matter how much insecurity still runs through both of them, he's at least glad he can witness peaceful moments like this and make the most of them while they last.

His attention then suddenly gets caught by the closet next to the door, which has one of its doors slightly opened. Without making any noise, he slowly gets up and sneaks towards it while knowing well it's nothing but Nicole's wardrobe. Once he opened its door further, he encounters something that makes him tear up a bit. How months ago there only used to be a small collection of damaged uniforms, the entire lower shelf of the closet is now completely stacked with tons of them. Richard picks some up with his paws and inspects them.

Ripped, demolished and torn to shreds. Every. Single. One. Of them. They are so badly damaged that not a single stitch can rescue them, but despite this, Nicole apparently didn't want to throw them out. Richard assumes it's because of shame... Some of the shirts were formerly drenched in blood, which unfortunately couldn't be entirely whitened again, and Richard has to force himself not to

gasp in order not to wake up the blue feline. *Too much has happened, hasn't it?*, he thinks to himself. *I knew all didn't go back to normal yet...*

The pink bunny doesn't really know what to think and puts the destroyed uniforms back where he found them, before closing the closet door again and turning around. While looking at his slumbering wife, he silently chuckles and one of his eyes briefly sheds a tear. *How can you possibly be responsible for all that mayhem...?* He eventually puts a paw on the doorknob but keeps still in his tracks before opening it, and looks another time at the innocent-looking mouser. *You're way too cute... I won't ever be able to see you differently anyways.* A slight smile appears on the bunny's snout and he eventually exits the room again. Before Gumball or Darwin can speak up, who were waiting at the other side, Richard gestures them to keep silent and takes them upstairs instead, where Anais is already asleep.

How Richard saw his wife in complete peace, not much of an enjoyable sleep starts going on once the clock counts further into the night...

There's not much light in the room as usual, mainly due to the sky being extremely cloudy at the moment. Nicole's nose suddenly starts twitching, like happened times before, and she occasionally frowns as an unknown type of shock runs through her body. A different shock... She starts trembling by an ice cold feeling spreading over her entire fur coat, as if she's in an imaginary blizzard. But when she eventually thinks she's awakening, she doesn't recognize what her eyes show her and realizes it's the work of her mind again...

A grayscale windowsill is all Nicole can see when she opens her eyes. Everything else is pitch black and the blue feline feels rather odd by it being a long time since she awakened in a lucid dream like this. She moves her pupils around and tries to discover what her mind is trying to tell her, like it attempted times before. Once she took pace into the direction of the bright window, she encounters the silhouette of another feline whose back is turned. The closer she gets, the clearer she can see their fur color and the now noticeable brown ears remind her of her own

father... But it's a way slimmer and taller feline... Could it be...?

***Nicole** : H-Hana? Is that you?*

***Hana** : ...What?*

The white with brown marked feline turns around in a rush, only to get surprised by the blue figure who called her name. She immediately lowers her ears and despite trying to look threatening by baring a fang, Nicole can still see in her eyes that she's in fact frightened.

***Hana** : W-who are you?... H-how do you know my n-name?*

***Nicole** : Please... calm down. I'm Nicole, your brother's... granddaughter.*

***Hana** : He had a granddaughter?... Oh, right... I died at 29...*

***Nicole** : Wait... you know?*

***Hana** : I'm nothing but an apparition your mind is creating right now, Nicole.*

Nicole drops silent and freezes while staring into the widened eyes of the white mouser in front of her. She inspects her outfit and can see the black dress like how Daniel described it. Hana can't help but constantly trembling and not being able to keep still for a single second. Nicole doesn't dare to speak up. The stories she heard from her parents remind her of how much the cat in front of her went through, without even thinking about her own experiences. Hana then suddenly narrows her eyes and the sclerae turn yellow, which makes Nicole gasp.

***Hana** : You're familiar with this too, aren't you...*

***Nicole** : I- I sort of... inherited it from you.*

***Hana** : I see, I see... You feel like a newbie to me though...*

***Nicole** : What? A newbie? I mean... I'm not sure if it's fair to consider me as new when I literally hunted down countless souls... and killed two.*

***Hana** : ... I know and I don't care. That doesn't indicate what I'm trying*

to say... Or... perhaps, you must be the Decided One.

***Nicole** : The what?*

***Hana** : See why you're a newbie? [Sighs] The fact you're still alive after all your disasters show you're the strongest in our blood chain.*

***Nicole** : I don't... I don't get it.*

***Hana** : Listen... Your situation has escalated so much that your Upper Limit decided to settle itself in your mind. All it's doing is trying to break you... After your murders, the sickness only started to let you develop an imaginary voice that drags you down all the time.*

***Nicole** : There's literally nothing that I despise more than that goshdarn voice... Why does it keep attempting to make me accept my insanity?*

***Hana** : Well, it's waiting for you to give in... as you're the strongest one to have the condition...*

***Nicole** : I'm... the strongest one?*

***Hana** : Yes. It's been having troubles with your abilities to stay upright... which is why you're the most picked on... Or should I say... were the most picked on...*

***Nicole** : What do you mean?*

***Hana** : [Whispers with a slight growl] It tries to kill you...*

Nicole gulps and takes a quick moment to stare at her own paws, only to immediately after move her eyes into the direction of Hana again.

***Hana** : No matter how much stronger you are compared to me and... past victims, it only started evolving itself and apparently now reached its most powerful level inside of you.*

***Nicole** : I- is there a way to stop it? I mean... for all...*

***Hana** : There is one... An antidote it can't get used to and that could keep it sedated for eternity... You see, legend speaks of a pow-*

Hana suddenly interrupts her own words by groaning and drops to the floor while grabbing onto her head with both paws. Nicole takes a big step backwards and her ears lower in fright.

***Nicole** : W-what power?... Hana?*

Hana stays with her knees on the ground and her tail twists itself heavily as a transformation starts unfolding which is familiar to Nicole without any doubt. But instead of reaching total savagery in a form that multiplied in size and strength, Hana seems like weakening and breaking down. She suddenly gasps and yells when blood starts flowing from her eyes and gums. Nicole covers her mouth with her paws and tears evolve in her widened eyes, while the white cat in front of her keeps releasing heart-breaking calls of agony. Once half of her face and chest are drenched in blood, she raises her head and reveals the same glowing yellow pupils Nicole had recognized on herself shortly ago. Hana bends her back and spits out a gallon of blood before raising her now rough and raspy voice.

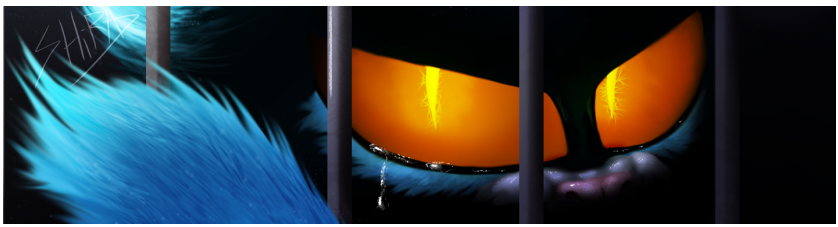
Hana : You will DIE, NICOLE... DIEEEEEE!

Nicole gasps and sits up in a rush, only to immediately start panting in shock. *It's... slowly... killing me...* She aggressively shakes her head and sternly shuts her eyes, refusing to cry, and instead gets out of bed. There's so much more to her sickness than she knows... And that power... *It could be a way to get rid of the madness once and for all, right?* Desire to find this possibility for reassurance starts mixing up with grief and fear, as the blue feline's mind only gets more and more restless. Her head aches by the recent dose of Arthrus, which was clearly too much, but couldn't sedate the savagery in another way.

Nicole grabs a glass from the cupboard in the kitchen and fills it, while thoughts about Hana flow through her head. *How has it come so far...? If I'm getting stronger, is it becoming stronger with me?* She takes a sip before sighing deeply and settling at the kitchen counter. It's getting close to midnight, but despite it not being too late yet, she still feels odd. Nights haven't always been enjoyable for her and full moons still strike fear into her. For some reason... it makes her feel unknown energy she doesn't recognize. Does this have to do with the Upper Limit? She doesn't know. In fact, she now feels

utmost stupid for not having done any further research whatsoever. Erin Warrington, her therapist, told it's an extremely rare condition and judging from any available records, the Senicourt bloodline was the only known case where it came about. But she still feels like some know way more than her...

Chapter 11 - Agonizing truth II



[*Senicourt*... Nicole stares at her phone which lays near the edge of the counter, where it's charging. Without hesitation she unplugs it from the cable and starts scrolling through her contacts with lowering brows. She doesn't care whether it's late or not... She needs answers...]

Mary: Hello?

Nicole: Hey Mom, it's me...

Mary: Nici? But why are you calling at *this* time?!

Nicole: Believe me, it's important. Listen, do you guys know anything more about Hana?

[Mary drops silent at the other side of the line, clearly not having expected her daughter to call nor bring that topic up. She sighs and Nicole can hear her father taking over the phone as he gets into his wife's presence. His tone is dark when he speaks up.]

Daniel: You're asking about Hana?

Nicole: Yes, and I beg you to tell me. I feel like there's more I should know.

Daniel: Oh dear, you don't wanna know...

Nicole: Trust me, Dad. I really do. Besides, I've heard *some* stories about her, so I'm eager to hear the rest.

Daniel: Hana... She was... something. I remember having had her as babysitter when I was a young kitten. My father had an important emergency meeting out of town and Mom was ill by an extremely contagious disease, meaning I couldn't stay alone with my still new born brother at that time. So he asked Hana to take care of me. She was around 25 at that time I assume from what he told me.

Nicole: Did she... take good care of you?

Daniel: Yes. Yes, she did. But gosh... she was scary. Not that she was mean or anything, but her overall behaviour and expressions were always so freaky to me. Whenever she'd hold my brother in her arms to feed him, her smile almost seemed like turning into a psycho grin. And her attitude, oh boy. Even my father, who was way older than her, didn't dare to get into an argument with her as her fuse was way shorter than mine. And I think that says something...

Nicole: Gosh I... I'm sorry you had to witness that then though. I didn't know...

Daniel: Don't worry about it. Like I said, I was very young and these memories are only sketched in my mind. Though I honestly never expected to get a daughter with those same...

[Daniel suddenly goes quiet and this leaves Nicole with lots of upwelling nervousness.]

Nicole: S-same what?...Dad?

Daniel: Genes! We didn't want you to get her... genes. I'm so sorry, Nicole.

Nicole: About what? Y-you know I'm born with this, right?

Daniel: That's exactly the problem. We're sorry for going through when we-

[Nicole's eyes widen when she suddenly hears her own father slightly sobbing. *Did he just start crying?* Her father? She had never, but never ever heard him cry before. Lowering her ears, she lets her head dangle a bit as it keeps aching by the overwhelming

information and her still ongoing confusion.]

Nicole: I d-don't understand... Y-you went through... with getting me, you mean?

[Mary then takes over the phone again as she manages to keep a stronger tone in her voice and is just as surprised by her suddenly emotional husband as her daughter.]

Mary: Listen, please don't get mad when I tell you this... But there's a reason why our pressure on you, which we regret to this day, was present back in those days.

Nicole: You've been pressuring me because you wanted the best for me, you said.

Mary: Y-yes, but no. We wanted to keep you distracted from getting any possible triggers.

Nicole: Triggers? For my condition you mean? B-but I thought-

Mary: Nicole, the diagnoses from way before you were born already indicated our offspring would get Hana's faulty genes in their DNA. That's why you don't have any siblings.

Nicole: WHAT?! You... you *knew* you were gonna get a kid with that sickness?! Why did you- Just... why, Mom? Why didn't you tell me...

Mary: We were blinded by the pride we could feel if we'd have a successful daughter... But soon enough we realized it wasn't the right thing to do and we decided not to stop you when you walked out on us that night... I wish I could've told you earlier, but we thought it would only strike fear and grief into you, thus forming a trigger.

[Nicole's confusion starts morphing into anger as she tightens her grip on her phone while gritting her teeth.]

Nicole: And you think all those years of pressure didn't form anything like a beginning trigger at all? Nobody with anger issues can handle stress well. You know that.

Mary: I know and I'm sorry. We just thought that if you were successful, you'd have a happier life and the condition wouldn't be as bad...

Nicole: Woah, woah there. Are you assuming this monstrosity got out of hand just because of the life choices I made?

Mary: N-no, I don't mean that... But you feel stressed by this lifestyle, right? I j-just thought you would've been happier o-otherwise.

[Nicole growls while her ears lower themselves.]

Nicole: Oh boy you were wrong! Instead of pushing antidotary medicine down my throat you decided to push high expectations in my face, how helpful! If you decided on getting a sick daughter, you could've at least GUIDED HER, DON'T YOU THINK?!

Mary: Oh please, Nicole-

Nicole: I AM RUINED, MOM! RUINED! Funny how you claimed not having raised me to become a murderer, when you literally ALLOWED IT TO HAPPEN ALL ALONG!

Mary: We didn't expect it to get out of hand like this!

Nicole: THEN WHY DID YOU TRY FORCING ME TO HAVE SUCH AN UNPLEASANT WAY OF LIVING?! I don't want to be married to a banking guy... I don't want to live like a celebrity doctor... All I care about is a loving family like I have now.

Mary: Look, I'm happy enough for you and you know we both eventually started accepting your choice... But look at your recent crime records... D-don't you want change in that?

Nicole: Bold of you to assume I don't want change... I am sick of this. I don't want to be a monster. I DIDN'T CHOOSE THIS!

[Mary keeps silent as she no longer knows what to say.]

Nicole: Besides, you wanna know why I'm still trying to hold on to this lifestyle? Because my goshdarn loving husband is my last will

to live. I've entirely mauled him. MAULED HIM multiple times! But he hasn't left me... And you know what...? [Snarls] HE'S TAKING BETTER CARE OF ME THAN EITHER OF YOU EVER COULD!

[Mary still doesn't dare to speak up and a cold silence rules at both ends for a few minutes. Nicole breaks down when she can't take it anymore and leaves the phone next to her on the kitchen counter, where she buries her face in her crossed arms. Tears flow down while her shoulders shake in total defeat, feeling way beyond overwhelmed... When the blue tabby suddenly can be heard sobbing, her mother decides to break the ice again, even though she feels a lump forming in her throat.]

Mary: [Sniffs] Darling, please... You're not a monster.

[Nicole opens her reddened eyes and stares at the phone screen as her tears keep her vision blurred.]

Mary: After every disaster so far you managed to keep yourself together and keep going... no matter the amount of help you've gotten. You kept going. I... I'm proud of you for that. And in the end, it's all we wanted... For you to keep going and improve yourself.

[Nicole keeps silent for a little bit longer as her mother's words sounded supportive for the first time... But when she tries to embrace and find comfort in them, the darker part of her mind feeds itself on her unstableness and becomes dominant again. Her brows lower themselves again and her snout wrinkles heavier by her bared teeth.]

Nicole: I've been just lucky. Without anyone around to help, I wouldn't even have been here anymore. *For how long have you two also known this sickness is slowly killing me...?*

Mary: K-killing you? I- I didn't know it was... fatal...?

[Nicole's pupils constrict in plain rage.]

Nicole: Well, you should've known! How else did Hana die?!

Mary: D-dear... Hana was a totally different situation... She wasn't

as strong as you.

Nicole: Oh yeah? Did she also grow up to eight feet then? Did she also end actual lives in her path?!

Mary: N-no, but-

Nicole: EXACTLY! If Hana was a bad case... I'm *way worse*... No matter how strong the victim is, it keeps growing and growing... Waiting for its moment to reach the last breath...

Mary: B-but you have to keep fighting!

Nicole: Fighting for what?! I simply can't take it anymore. I'm EXHAUSTED! I don't know how much longer it'll take for that monstrosity to become part of me forever...

Mary: It won't become part of you! It never has been, Nicole!

Nicole: Then please explain why it's becoming so goshdarn *tempting* to-

[Nicole suddenly interrupts herself as she covers her mouth with her paws as her eyes widen in shock. She squeezes her eyes tightly closed and frustratedly holds her head. *Was that really something she wanted to say...?*]

Mary: Listen to yourself... You're picking a side here, Nicole. But reassurance isn't coming soon if you can't pick the one that's healthy for you.

[Nicole's sobbing continues as she groans a few times by her hurting head. Refusing to think any further about it, she stressfully scratches with the unsheathing claws of her right paw onto the counter's stone.]

Mary: Look... I understand everything is overwhelming right now and you're probably too overcome by many emotions. Just... take a rest and let it all go through you. It's... quite late anyway...

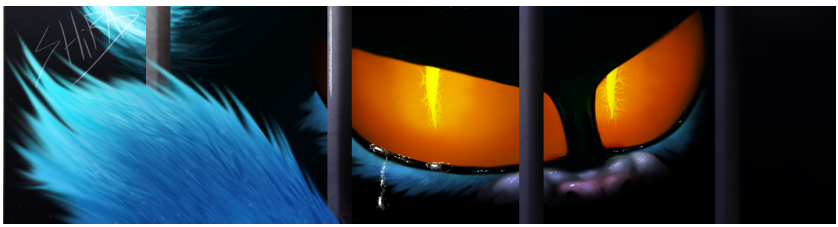
[...]

Mary: ...Nicole?

[Nicole doesn't say another word and keeps extremely quiet, only to immediately hang up and turn off her phone.

Tempting? ...Tempting?! What was that all about?!

Chapter 12 - Felis Catus



[The blue feline gets up from the counter's stool and wanders towards the window after having read 1AM on the clock. The dark clouds didn't disappear yet, but there doesn't seem to be any rain. She stares blankly at the shed at the other side of the grass and can't help but gulp when she remembers everything that happened there as well... But no matter how guilty she still feels for all those past disasters, tonight's reveal didn't do well at all. Her parents knew she would be sick all along... and thought their expectations would prevent any triggers for it to unfold...

Sure, it's true that none of her childhood events were a huge trigger for the Upper Limit, but still... It wasn't any fun and she believes she could've been way happier if she were able to enjoy those years. She then only concludes how lucky she is with Richard. *That cute fluffy bunny... The only one to get to know the real me...*

Nicole's attention then suddenly gets caught by a housecat crossing over on the garden's fence. The blue feline straightens her back and stares at the little creature which resembles a feral part of her. It briefly catches Nicole's eyes inspecting its white fur and keeps still for a moment, only to tilt its head a bit. Nicole can't help but clatter her teeth the next second, giving a feral signal that she didn't expect she was even capable of. While the tall, bipedal feline keeps staring into the green eyes of the small, quadruped one, she enters the backyard and approaches.

Not having much control over her current behaviour, she lets herself lower onto all fours and embraces the white cat rubbing its scent onto her arm. Nicole had never seen the cat before, nor did it

look like any of the other neighbourhood housecats she encountered. But something makes her think of the past... Its bright white fur... Deep, green eyes... Nicole can't help but think of the large white cat from the Big Cat Rescue Park she eventually revisited a year ago. It was her main location to escape as a kid whenever she'd feel overwhelmed or scared... But then it hits her... A memory that almost completely disappeared from her mind... *I've been scared before, a long time ago...*

Thursday 10.00PM 1983

The sun set and evening fell. Only wind blowing through the trees outside gave a sign of life in the rather obnoxious atmosphere. Despite it not even having been that late, not a single soul could be found on the streets as everyone seemed like sheltering themselves in their own homes. A small blue kitten had to do her best to fight through the uneasiness of this day, even though nothing bad had happened at all. No matter how tired she felt, she couldn't sleep yet. How she first had been browsing through her drawing albums, the eight year old decided to try getting some shut eye anyways. She swung her legs over the border of her bed and took her pace towards the bathroom while she kept her shoulders high. The blue kitten sniffled her nose as soon as she climbed onto the stool to reach the sink, being too small to do it herself. She grabbed her toothbrush and did nothing but the usual after she spread a bit of paste onto it.

But as soon as she assumed she was ready, she suddenly winced by an electrifying pain rushing through her gums. While gasping, she tried to force herself not to cry by her now bleeding teeth. She feared she might had brushed them too harshly, but strongly refused to assume that was the issue. The little cat bent a bit forward to inspect her maw in the mirror, and immediately saw what was up. She suddenly received six fangs, that had grown within seconds after she only lost her premature teeth shortly ago. She gasped again and couldn't believe it. There hadn't been anything but small corners surrounded by gums earlier that day... and now out of a sudden... she had fully grown adult fangs. Adult, but only in their earlier stages, she assumed from their still rough surface.

Having been able to tolerate the pain eventually, she rinsed her mouth

with water and hoped no issues would came to be regarding her teeth anytime soon as she dried her face with a towel. But once she wanted to turn around and return to her room again, something unsettled her once she switched off the light. While shaking her head, assuming she had been hallucinating a bit, she closed her eyes for a brief moment. Was that real what she just saw? She held her head tightly and took a deep breath before opening her eyes again, only to see everything was normal again. Trying her best to process but not think too much about it at the same time, the little blue feline closed the door and changed into her pyjamas as soon as she entered her own room again.

But when she gave herself another glance in the closet's mirror, she saw it again...

What was that?

Why was it there?

Was it her?

What seemed like a relaxing feeling to go to sleep, soon turned into upwelling fear and worry as the little blue feline started descending from the stairs and tip toed to her parents. She kept still for a brief moment while holding the wall with her paw and peeked around the corner, only to see her parents minding their own businesses. She sighed and tried to get herself together while her heart pounded in her chest as she stepped forward.

***Daniel** : Nicole? Why are you still awake?*

The calico spoke with an impatient tone.

***Nicole** : M-mom? Dad? S-should I be scared of the yellow eyes?*

***Mary** : Which yellow eyes, Nici?*

Mary's cold voice was filled with worry as she lowered the newspaper in her paws and sternly stared into the frightened eyes of her daughter.

***Nicole** : The ones in the mirror...*

Mary and Daniel gave each other a concerning glare as they knew

exactly what she meant and started fearing they were right since the beginning... Mary eventually got up and took her daughter into her arms while walking upstairs again.

***Mary** : Oh darling, don't you worry about that. You either are very sleepy right now or saw something that seemed differently.*

***Nicole** : B-but M-Mom... what about my teeth?*

***Mary** : Your teeth?*

***Nicole** : They changed!*

Mary carefully put her daughter onto the bed as she settled next to her with lowering ears. She raised a brow and left Nicole with no other option than showing it. The little blue feline moved a bit closer to her mother and pulled her lips backward with her paws to show the six, long and sharp fangs that had replaced her premature teeth. Mary had to force herself not to look too terrified as soon as she saw the unusually sharp keratin in her daughter's maw. But she soon enough got herself together and spoke up with a poker face.

***Mary** : That just means you're growing up, dear. Don't worry about it.*

***Nicole** : B-but they grew out of a sudden! I-isn't that weird?*

***Mary** : You're an early bird regarding lots of stuff. You will grow up to become a strong cat, that's what those fangs indicate.*

Mary had a slight smile on her face which was enough for Nicole to calm a bit down, thus becoming tired. The little blue feline yawned and her mother took the signal while tucking her in. How she first watched her daughter falling into deep slumber in complete peace, she now felt extreme stress rising within as soon as the tabby-siamese exited the room. She started taking her pace more quickly downstairs to immediately face her husband with a distressed expression on her face.

***Mary** : Daniel, what do we do?! The kid's eight! Did Hana shift at such a young age as well?!*

***Daniel** : Calm down, honey... I'm not sure what the exact case was with Hana, but I refuse to think it'll all turn out like her.*

***Mary** : It weren't just her eyes! She showed me her teeth and they were beyond unusual! Are you sure this is fine?*

***Daniel** : If it was just her look, nothing is wrong. We just gotta monitor her behaviour more from now on...*

***Mary** : I don't feel secure, Daniel. Judging from everything you told me about Hana... I'm scared. Genuinely scared.*

***Daniel** : You're scared of your own daughter? Come on, Mary. The kid has no one else but us to rely on. We better make sure she'll have a great life in the future.*

***Mary** : Yeah... I think... that's the best thing to do. M-maybe she'll grow out of it.*

***Daniel** : The condition is chronic, but we can at least hope that it won't get triggered...*

***Mary** : Let's hope for that...*

Friday 1.30AM 2015

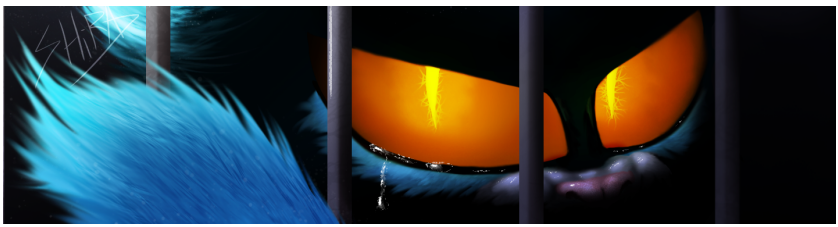
Nicole's eyes are filled with fury and tears as soon as she opens them up again, after a flashback that felt like ages. Her mind had never dozed off that badly before as she didn't even get aware of her sudden behaviour just now. Her eyes widen in shock when she sees she's crouching on the grass, still being in the backyard, and has her teeth deeply sunken into something. Starting to get a bit more aware of her surroundings again, the blue feline then releases a ball of fur that had been stuck in her mouth for an unknown reason. She then gasps when she sees it's the white housecat that greeted her earlier.

Or, more specifically, it *was* the housecat. Realizing she unconsciously bit it to death, a strong sickening feeling starts dominating her. *She killed someone's cat!* When she wants to pick its body up, she strongly hesitates by the blood on her paws which she only just noticed. She gags and covers her mouth, immediately making a mistake as she now accidentally tastes the red liquid,

which makes her gag again. She rather had fainted by the metallic smell, but forces herself to stay strong. She takes a few deep breaths while closing her eyes, standing there... with blood dripping from both her paws... and a dead feral cat in front of her. When she finally feels like calming down the next minute, her hope shatters when she hears someone speak up in her presence and her body starts to tremble a bit.

No, not someone... Some*thing*...

Chapter 13 - The craving



*" **Oooh... What do we have here..?** "*

The Upper Limit's imaginary voice sounds desperate after a long break from having spoken.

"N-no! T-this can't be happening!"

Nicole stares at the lifeless body of the housecat in front of her with constricting pupils. The next second she was planning to throw it out, the sickening feeling from earlier suddenly returns. Heavier...

*" **That little thing must've had a rough life anyway...** "*

"Why did you do this...? W-why did you make m-me kill it...?"

*" **Oh, I didn't...** "*

"Ugh I don't want to hear you manipulate me right now..."

The blue feline then suddenly holds onto her stomach with one paw while covering her mouth with the other and gags once more.

"W-what is happening...? I- I f-feel sick..."

*" **We're hungry.** "*

"W-what?"

*" **We're hungry again, cat... I see I spawned at the right time...** "*

"W-what are you gonna do to me? Y-you won't be able t-to repeat my

fish disaster!"

Nicole hisses and closes her eyes in anguish, feeling a cramp she felt before.

*" **I know I can't... You, how insufferable and annoying you are, managed to find another way to go against my assistance!** "*

"Excuse me, 'assistance'?! You're the wretched curse that keeps dragging me down and into mess!"

*" **There's not much I have to do anymore though... Heheh...** "*

Nicole suddenly groans as her pain starts to increase.

"What... d-do... you mean...?"

*" **Hehehe... HAHAHAHAHAAH! OH YOU DON'T KNOW, DO YOU?! YOU'RE ALREADY INSANE ENOUGH NOW TO A LEVEL WHERE THERE'S NO RETURN, CAT!** "*

"H-how-"

*" **It's finally all working out... You were such a pain to turn over, with your hopeless little family of prey...** "*

"W-what?!"

*" **But now there's nothing you can do to revive your hesitation...** "*

"H-hesitati-"

The mouser interrupts herself as the next cramp feels way worse and she lets herself fall onto her knees. She starts panting and shivering as she feels her heart racing. One look at the dead cat would've been enough to make her realize what's going on, but her normal senses drown by her dominating monstrosity... She growls a few times with lowering ears and starts wandering towards the body on all fours.

The now more ragged up blue feline can't even get surprised by the sudden heavy amount of saliva dripping from her mouth as she

towers above it. Its formerly green eyes now stare into nothingness with faded lenses and its white fur drooped. Nicole's widened eyes move from its head to its fluffy belly and she moves her head closer to smell. She then completely loses it while sinking her teeth straight into the soft fur, biting through the cat's skin until she reaches its flesh. Gooey blood splatters all over her snout and doesn't even make her gag once she can taste it on her tongue. Instead, it only increases the sickening feeling dominating her until she feels a terrific craving for more...

Her vision goes completely blurry while her other senses take complete control as some more drool flows down from her jaws. With a widely opened maw, she keeps digging her teeth further into the carcass to take a bite out of its intestines. Once she manages to swallow a big lump of slimy guts, there's no stopping to it and the blue feline continues devouring the deceased little predator...

The blue feline suddenly gets up after having passed out for a brief moment and opens her fatigued eyes while staring at the puddle of blood in front of her. She had been clever enough to wash the blood on her paws away before it'd dry, but her mouth is still covered with it. She shakes her head and feels like her normal senses returned again. But she can't even be glad about it when she encounters a small collar while getting up and suddenly recalls what happened. While grunting in disgust and unease, she limps into the house and abandons the backyard without looking back.

Once she reached the bedroom door where Richard lies in complete slumber, she strongly hesitates entering. Her head hurts as it begs for sleep, but her stomach full of feline flesh keeps her awake. She then starts freaking out by the fact she didn't even transform while it happened... She was overcome by such a strong, new temptation she only expected on her at her worst stage. She leans with her back against the wall and lets herself slide down until she can wrap her arms around her knees, only to keep her head up high while panting again. She closes her eyes and feels tears streaming down her cheeks.

What a mess... But the way she was about to become more shocked and saddened, the sickening feeling returns... differently...

She sniffs her nose. She sniffs her nose quickly, a few times. Her shoulders shake a bit when she starts whimpering.

She starts chuckling.

She starts laughing.

The blue cat then opens her eyes again to reveal glowing yellow pupils as her brows lower themselves. Some of her joints crack as her limbs twitch a few times. While hunching, she gets up and limps towards the front door while forcing herself not to look back. After having gone outside, she closes the door behind her and accidentally digs a few slits into its wood with her suddenly unsheathing claws. With every step she then takes away from the house, she lowers her body more and more until her spine starts crackling. She eventually has no choice but to let herself fall to the floor as her entire system starts trembling. While digging her claws into the concrete, she groans and grits her teeth by the agony she'll never get used to. Once her teeth get their keratin increased, the sound of tearing fabric can clearly be heard in the silent streets...

A few blocks further, not too far away, lies a smaller and more peaceful part of Elmore's neighbourhood. Only one single light is still on in a certain house, of a known figure. The house is big and well organized, typical for a middle aged individual who works in the health department. The 'Fam. Warrington' sign outside at the front door reflects the moonlight from the clear sky and gives away which family lives here.

Erin Warrington, an average sized raven humanoid, is a single father of a little son and daughter after his wife passed. Aleena, how she was called, deceased due to a mental illness having caused too much physical damage and this only left Erin with more understanding for his patients. Especially one. A blue feline mother had been denied by lots of therapists due to them not being able to help her or by assumptions she was lying. But Erin knew she spoke the truth and even felt determined to do research about her condition, without it even being his field of expertise. He cares about her and him being the only right therapist for Nicole, made her feel more attached to his support.

Erin had given Nicole a break from the sessions until summer arrived, as she made an appointment as soon as the disaster at Elmore Jr High took place. He felt slightly disappointed in himself for unknown reasons, but was glad enough she called at the right time. He knows she took his warnings seriously and did her best to stick to her structured Arthrus intake, but something still leaves him insecure. He doesn't know enough about the condition to answer all questions he has, nor can it be found... It's still too rare... He started worrying about how much longer it could go on like this... He found out vein rending would cause the possible last breath of an Upper Limit victim, but is that really everything it leads to?

Erin shakes his head and snaps himself out of his thoughts again. He then widens his eyes when he notices a light still being on in his kids' room and enters it with crossed arms. But before he tells them to go to bed immediately, he sees his five year old son sobbing into the arms of his six year old daughter. She looks her father in the eye with tears once she noticed him entering the room and doesn't manage to keep her brother calm.]

Erin: Kira? What happened to your brother?

Kira: H-he still m-misses him, Dad.

[Erin sighs with raising brows and settles next to his daughter, while taking his sobbing son on his lap and keeps hugging him.]

Erin: There, there.

Kira: W-will he ever come back? I m-miss him too.

Erin: I still have hope, Kira. It hasn't been a week since Fluff went missing yet, so I'm still hoping for people to notice the posters.

Kira: B-but what if he's scared out there? He's such a little kitty...

Erin: I bet he isn't, dear. He's an adult cat, despite being small, and knows lots of the roads around here. I bet he just went out of his direction by accident and ended up wandering in the wrong side of the neighbourhood.

Kira: [Sniffles] Hmm... M-maybe you're right. I just hope he's

alright. W-won't he be cold a-and hungry though?

Erin: It's summer. And I don't think so. There's a lot of wild mice and birds he might be able to catch. Just stay positive.

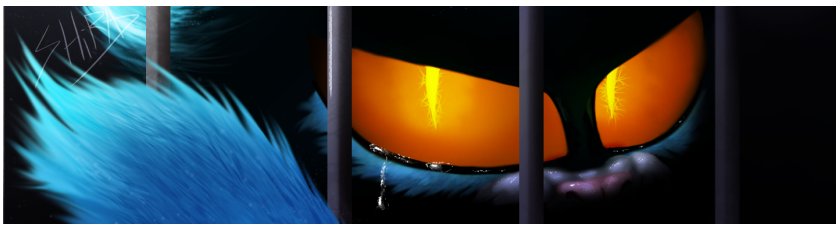
Kira: W-what if he gets attacked by a dog?!

[Erin wraps a wing around his trembling daughter and looks her deeply in the eye.]

Erin: Honey, Fluff will be alright. He's a fast and smart cat that manages to outrun any dog. The only thing that doesn't make him flee are other cats.

[Kira nods and timidly wipes her tears away, only to look at her brother who now fell asleep. A reassuring smile appears on Erin's beak as he tucks both of the little ravens in. He stays for a little while until Kira falls asleep as well and keeps caressing the fluffy feathers on her head...

Chapter 14 - Feathers



[The well-known tale of monsters hiding in closets has ruled among the younger fellows for a long time, with that being the main reason why both Kira and Raiko preferred to have the doors of theirs closed at night. So sweet, so gullible, those two little ravens, completely unaware of the loose lock on their window. Dense mist fills the streets with obnoxious vibes and makes it hard for anyone to navigate properly. As if anyone would need to navigate at this hour. 3AM. A usual hour for disaster to take place, isn't it?

Nicole, or more specifically, the eight feet monster finds herself at a dead end nearby where Elmore fades into nothing but forest. Her narrowing yellow eyes are filled with impatience and reflect nothing but sharp agony as she tries getting used to her faded surroundings. Clear vision was something that didn't directly matter to the Upper Limit, but no matter how complicated identifying separate individuals would be at this moment, any being would sound like good prey to it anyway. The ongoing static in her mind soon starts fading into inaudible meows which immediately remind her of their previous presence from months ago. The last small sane bit of her that is left causes her to grunt in unease by hearing those feral calls and eventually gives up on trying to keep herself upright. Exhaustion starts weakening her consciousness and the dominating feral sickness takes over her mind again, without her even being able to resist.

" Let's do this again... as ONE! "

Raiko gasps while suddenly sitting up straight in his bed. A certain unidentified sound woke him up, together with a wretched nightmare already having made his slumber light. The little raven rubs his eyes and tightly hugs his teddy bear, desperately trying to find comfort in the inanimate object and forgetting about his worries. Fluff. That's who he had his nightmare about. The pet cat has always meant a lot to him and his sister, with it having served as a great companion in order to make their mother's death handleable. Despite neither of the kids having gotten to know their mother, they still felt a lot of grief which was mainly projected by their father Erin, which made adopting the cat a good move for all of them. Seeing his children having fun with the little creature retrieved the happiness Erin missed for a long time.

But now it's the cat that has gone missing. Raiko trusts his father greatly, but his words didn't manage to convince him into thinking their pet is alright. His nightmare showed something he hasn't ever dreamed about... nor was it something he expected. The little raven shivers for a brief moment before focusing his eyes on the drawing attributes in the corner of their room. Trying not to make a sound in order to prevent waking up his sister, he sits down on the carpet next to the window and grabs a sketchbook. While tears evolve in his eyes, he starts putting lines on the paper with a black pencil and tries to get the image from his nightmare out of his head. Pointy lines. A lot of pointy lines. Sharp teeth. A lot of sharp teeth.

Then suddenly, the little bird can't control his emotions anymore and breaks down into tears. Fear gets replaced with grief as memories about his loved pet flash in front of his eyes. His sobbing causes his sister to wake up, but she can't even be mad about it when she sees her brother crying. Kira swings her feet over her bed's edge and quickly approaches Raiko, immediately wrapping her wings around him.]

Kira: Raiko?! What's w-wrong?

[Raiko raises his head and heartbrokenly stares into the eyes of his sister with his reddened ones. His already high-pitched voice squeaks as he doesn't manage to speak up properly.]

Raiko: I- I'm s-so scared for Fluff...

Kira: B-but you heard what Dad s-said. I'm s-sure he'll be alright.

[Raiko doesn't even manage to speak up another time as he suddenly gets interrupted by a voice outside, what seems like coming from their window. A deep and rough voice accompanied by a terrifying growl.

"**You're worried about someone?**"

Both Raiko and Kira gasp in shock and surprise as they turn their faces to the window, only to jump up when they see two eyes staring at them. Glowing yellow eyes. Accompanied by a terrifying toothy grin which reveals dagger-sharp fangs that are so brightly white they can be seen in the total darkness outside. The figure reveals its large size when it slyly crawls through the window and enters the room. Kira timidly nods to answer its question and tightens her hug around Raiko to attempt protecting him from the intimidating silhouette. The little female raven stressfully grabs a flashlight from the pile of toys next to her and shines it into the creature's direction after gently letting go of Raiko. The creature narrows its eyes by the bright light and hisses while taking a step forward on all fours.

The manufactured light source makes its fur color visible and reveals a light blue shade, accompanied by a terribly torn white collared shirt and a grey skirt. Long, wild fur doesn't help with making the what clearly turns out to be a feline, seem less dangerous by its freakishly long fangs. Not expecting it could speak up, Kira manages to keep herself together after inspecting its frightening appearance. Raiko does not say a word and keeps staring up at the large beast's eyes above him.]

Kira: W-what do you want from us? W-who are you?

Nicole: **I'm a being of no name... but I just might know more... if who you're worried about is... a pet.**

Kira: H-how do you know that? Have y-you been spying on u-us?

Nicole: **Sweet child. I'm a being of great knowledge... Don't be so alarmed...**

Kira: What... are you?

[The beast gives a quick, stern glare at the little raven which makes her gulp and keep silent. She timidly lowers her head and tries to hide her face behind her flashlight.]

Nicole: **Turn that blinding light off, will ya.**

[Kira's eyes widen further and she starts shivering while turning it off, embracing the darkness again as her now terrified brother crawls closer to her.]

Nicole: **Now you might as well be able to tell me... if that 'Fluff' you're worried about... is a pet cat?**

Kira: Y-yes... D-do you know where h-he is?

Nicole: **He's dead, child.**

[Both Kira and Raiko gasp, only for the youngest sibling to start sobbing again as he assumes his nightmare has come true. Kira gets tears in her eyes as well, but refuses to let it get through.]

Kira: I don't believe you. H-how are you s-sure?

Nicole: **Heheh... I've seen it... with my own eyes...**

[The monster lowers its ginormous head and grins again while speaking those last words, widening its eyes as their glow reflects in Kira's.]

Kira: Prove it.

Nicole: **You really wanna know what happened to it, don't you...?**

[Kira gulps again and nods courageously as she wraps a wing around her trembling little brother. The next second, the feline monster bursts into sinister laughter that causes both ravens feeling even more odd and scared. Kira can't take it anymore and jumps backward in fear, letting her flight instinct dominate and tumbles over. Raiko starts sobbing more heavily as he covers his eyes with

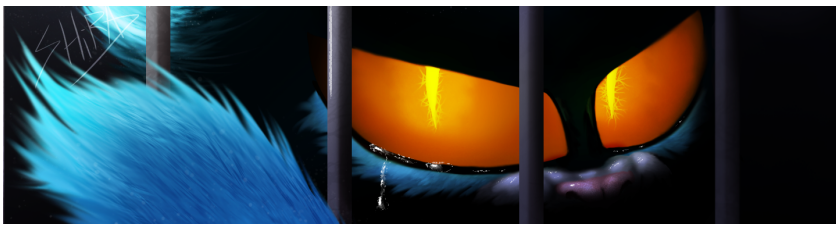
his wings, not being able to see the monster's sudden change of position.

Kira had sternly closed her eyes seconds ago in fear, but immediately regrets it when she opens them again. Her brother doesn't even get the chance to scream when he roughly gets picked up by giant jaws that surround and capture him. The small male raven helplessly tries to dig his wings into the carpet, but gets pulled away by strength he could never top. Kira gasps in shock and attempted freeing her brother from the large teeth before he got picked up, but fails as his wings slip away from hers. The feline beast, who had already realized the birds' feathers made its temptation increase out of a sudden, heartlessly murmurs while drool flows down its jaws in heavy amounts, covering Raiko in the process. It speaks while its pupils constrict even further until nothing is left but two glowing yellow slits.

"**YOU'LL GET TO MEET YOUR PRECIOUS FLUFF AGAIN!**"

Kira tries to scream it out when within the blink of an eye nothing in the monster's maw is left but sticky blood and black feathers, after hearing a terrible, harsh snapping noise. No sound comes from her throat as her beak is gaped wide open and tears continue running down her cheeks. She never felt so heartbroken and afraid at the same time before, but due to the unexpected heavy turn of the scene, she ends up paralyzed in her stand... what results in making the mistake of giving the beast a chance as it jumps right into her direction with stretched out clawed paws...

Chapter 15 - Anguish



[The night feels endless as it comes to Nicole's realization time didn't pass a lot since she returned home. She clearly remembers having gone outside after becoming overwhelmed by the disastrous incident with the white housecat, but anything after that faded into complete mystery. Her head hasn't stopped hurting, nor does she manage becoming completely aware of her surroundings again after 'waking up' at the doorstep, despite not having gone to sleep at all. *What just happened?* Her mind certainly refuses to tell anything else after having given her such a heavy nightmare, which resulted in the call to her parents and ended up being the cause of all the following consequences. A part of her wishes she didn't call them nor got to know about the truth, while the other felt obligated to have her questions answered. But not enough got answered. Yet.

Is that really what it's all about? Finding out the mystery behind the way she is, who she is and what she became? For a long time she assumed it only had to do with her slightly supernatural capabilities not going along well with her short temper, only to recently have found out it's far from just that... After having held her aching head with her paws at the doorstep for full ten minutes, the blue feline takes pace towards the stairs, where she immediately catches herself in her demolished uniform in the mirror. While shaking her head, she soon realizes it was one of her episodes again. But how? Did she forget her medicine again? Or was it... intentional? *No way*, she thinks. *I haven't given up yet...* Starting to feel uneasy about not knowing what exactly happened while she was outside, the mouser forces herself not to think too much about it and makes her way upstairs to clean herself up.

She carefully turns on the lights and checks the time. 5AM. The sun hasn't started rising yet, but the cloudy sky can clearly be seen getting slightly brighter already. *Good morning,* she sarcastically thinks to herself while grabbing a new uniform from the closet. Despite owning a few other outfits, the cat never really bothered straying from wearing her work outfit during weekends as well. Especially right now, it gave her a sense of courage and comfort by it being something closely familiar. Furthermore, she felt proud of herself for managing going back to work after one of the most intense battles she has had with herself months ago.

Right after feeling that slight bit of pride and hope, her mind returns in its messier state and immediately hits her with flashbacks from those dark weeks. She stands completely still in her tracks while her eyes don't manage focusing on whatever is in front of her and lets her arms dangle lifelessly, with the new uniform in one of her paws. A cold shiver runs up her spine when she hears terrified screams of a child in her mind. Screams of a helpless child she doesn't manage to identify, yet she assumes it was Darwin. Her lovable adoptive son she ultimately traumatized during the terrific phase where she found her condition at its worst. She sees the flashing images of her skinny body, that was close to becoming just bones during that time of fear and illness. She never thought she could become so scared of her own body. How her fears started including being afraid of her own unstable mind, her physical system soon got a spot as well. *I will never be able to forgive myself anyway*.

Nicole freezes when the mirror reveals something that immediately unsettles her. Why didn't she notice it downstairs? The bathroom's already cold ambiance doesn't help with making it any less uneasy, together with the bright lights revealing every single detail of her now. Her mouth is covered in blood that had gone dry and turned dull. Her mind immediately fires an alarm as she takes her earlier thoughts back. She rather slapped herself in the face, starting to feel desperate for a clear mind. How the steps she took on the stairs felt effortless, her vision morphs into its earlier blurry state again. She restlessly checks the rest of her figure in case she missed out on more traces, but her face is the only place where the red fluid stained. *What the heck did I d-*

Then suddenly, what feels out of nowhere, a disgustingly sickening urge rises within her. She gasps and drops the clothing she had in her paws, letting herself fall to the floor and gritting her teeth in agony. *It isn't over yet? Is it... IS IT REPEATING? REPEATING?!,* she helplessly thinks as she feels tears evolving in her eyes. Not being able to handle this new level of anguish, the feline roughly sobs and groans while feeling as if her stomach just set itself on fire. But despite knowing well the Upper Limit is messing with her without any doubt, she doesn't know what it wants now nor what it's doing. Or is it a natural reaction from her body itself? Mentally preparing for the sinister voice to speak up again while trying hard at resisting the pain, she keeps her paws underneath her and uses them to keep herself from laying down. Or... perhaps laying down could help? Desperate to find any way to stop the forking agony, she lets her paws slide away from underneath her and carefully lets her chest hit the floor, laying down with her eyes closed. Her tail stops swinging restlessly and she actually feels slightly better, especially when she doesn't even hear the voice speaking up at all.

The blue feline then was about to sigh in relief, but those seconds of bettering immediately turn into the same pain when she tries getting up again. She yowls, but refuses to stay down and forcibly gets on her knees, trying to sit up straight. She starts panting in fear when she notices her ribcage revealing itself through her torn shirt the next second. *What is happening? Am I missing out? What didn't I see?* The next minutes then turn into some of the most agonizing ones she has ever had by far.

Her spine cracks and she feels the nasty urge from earlier returning, making her gag and bend over. She feels like her burning stomach turns itself inside out when something sharp rises up in her throat and she suddenly throws up what seems like an avian's skull, accompanied by gallons of acidic blood. Her eyes widen in shock when she opens them again and lets her head dangle while panting heavily and staring at the skull, soon discovering it's a raven's. It's small, but couldn't ever match the size of a generic feral raven, which strikes immediate panic into Nicole. But she doesn't even have the time to analyse which ravens she knows in her surroundings when she feels the burning feeling again. Tears start flowing down her cheeks when another, identical, skull leaves her

maw in the same agonizing way as the other.

She uneasily grunts while forcing herself to stop sobbing as her vision stays pinned on the bloody skulls in front of her. She then has no other option than closing her eyes again and taking a deep breath. Her now oversensitive ears manage to pick up footsteps getting nearby and her heartbeat increases speed while she feels desperate to get up again. But she can't. She's stuck in the agonizing misery her body is tampering her with and can't help but hyperventilate as soon as the door swings further open.]

Richard: H-honey? Is that you?

[Nicole can't even feel relieved to hear her husband's voice revealing he's there and keeps hyperventilating when he enters the bathroom. The bunny's jaw drops open in shock when he encounters his wife powerlessly on the ground and feels nauseous when the shrivelled up skulls catch his attention. The next second, the blue feline lurches forward and helplessly grabs hold onto her husband's shoulders while wailing. How he first felt shocked and scared, grief and guilt hit him for not knowing what exactly to do. He gently caresses the back of the cat's head, who has her face buried in his shirt. His heart shatters even further when he can feel her entire system trembling and the exposed ribs when he wraps his arms around her, making him aware of how vulnerable she currently is. She then opens her reddened eyes with pupils that constrict in fright and her now raspy voice heavily cracks when she forcibly speaks up.]

Nicole: I- I'm broken, R-Richard... Please... Please fix me...

Richard: F-fix you? Darling... w-what happened?

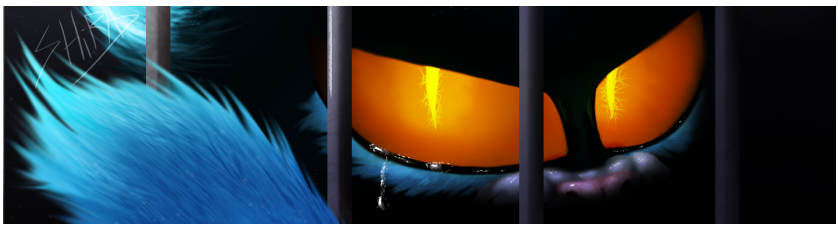
[Nicole's stressing out increases and her nerves cause her voice to crack even more, which unsettles Richard who tries his best to calm her down.]

Nicole: [While panting] I don't k-know... I don't know- I'm terrified... I m-made a mess a-again. I can't even r-recall it... W-what's *happening to me...*?

[Those last words fade into low whispering until she doesn't manage to speak any longer and faints out of exhaustion. Richard gasps and checks her pulse out of reflex when she suddenly becomes powerless. Being relieved he can still feel it beating, the pink bunny gently takes her in his arms and carries her downstairs, before cleaning up the mess on the floor. He didn't have any trouble with tucking her in, but cold fear spikes up within him when he notices the skulls again and quickly puts them away in a plastic bag. On his way to the living room, after having thrown them away, he freezes when the kitchen's window catches his attention and stares out of it. His heart sinks deeply when he notices something unsettling. The pink bunny stressfully holds the collar of his shirt with one paw and feels his heart racing when he sees a lot of blood staining most of the lawn. Hoping it was just an apparition or him not being entirely awake, he turns around while shaking his head. But what he encounters next doesn't manage to prove that to him.

A small, green collar.

Chapter 16 - Realization



Saturday 12.00PM

[Nicole groans heavily as soon as she wakes up and gets caught off guard when she checks the time. Her head throbs a slight bit and her eyes widen when she remembers what happened that night. She quickly gets up and yawns while carefully making her way to the door. Getting used to the bright daylight again, the blue feline squints her eyes until she sits down at the dining table. Richard, who just returned from the garden, gulps when he notices his wife suddenly having made her way out of the bedroom. His heart starts beating faster and he glances outside through the window, where he just had cleaned up blood on the lawn. His ears drop and he slowly approaches the feline, who rests her head on her crossed arms on the table, still groaning in unease. Once she notices him at the table the next second, she quickly rises up and her brows rise as her expression turns concerned. Richard sits down next to her and gently puts his paw onto hers.]

Richard: Are you feeling alright, honey?

[Nicole feels a lump forming in her throat, but swallows it away as she tries to keep herself together.]

Nicole: B-better than last night at l-least...

[Richard doesn't have the option but to bring up the subject when he suddenly feels his worry dominating him. He frowns and puts a small, green collar on the table in front of the cat. Nicole gets tears in her eyes when she recognizes it.]

Richard: Nicole...? What happened...?

[Nicole turns her head away as tears commence streaming down her cheeks and can't handle looking at the collar any longer. She sniffs and starts shivering. The pink bunny moves closer and wraps an arm around her for comfort. He frowns as he does wish for an answer.]

Richard: I'm extremely worried, dear... You haven't even touched the can in the fridge last night.

Nicole: [In a raspy voice] T-the what?

Richard: You know, the cans of tuna that we keep in the fridge for whenever you get hungry at night. The one precaution we kept after the incidents from months ago, remember?

Nicole: Oh... Oh yeah... I- I d-didn't really n-need it...

Richard: You were awake last night, Nicole. What did you do?

Nicole: I... I c-can't...

Richard: Please, I'm begging you. I need to know what is going on so it can be fixed!

Nicole: It can't be fixed.

[Nicole keeps silent and grits her teeth while tears still flow from her eyes, but her tone suddenly darkens as she starts feeling frustrated as well.]

Nicole: I ate a cat, Richard.

[Richard's jaw drops open and his pupils shrink in fear, but still waits for her to speak.]

Nicole: It all started with a phone call I had with Mom and Dad, as I felt curious about Hana after having a nightmare about her... I then got to know they hid information from me and my past had been more complicated than I remembered. Besides, I've lost all my grip I thought I had...

Richard: Grip on the-

Nicole: The Upper Limit, yes. I was just too overcome by emotions and it got me triggered in the most unfortunate way...

Richard: S-so y-

Nicole: I've killed in the past. I've killed another time. My stomach hurts when I think of that pet cat again, but I've entirely lost it now... Those raven skulls... Those too...

[Richard wanted to speak up, but he keeps quiet when he suddenly sees his wife's pupils constricting and her giving a lifeless glare, as if her soul just left her body. She speaks while excessively baring her fangs and tears no longer stream down her cheeks.]

Nicole: I'm becoming one with it... I've fought it so intensively for years now, but I don't get why I haven't given up earlier.

Richard: Nicole, that's nonsense. You did feel like giving up multiple times, but managed to get your good spirit back! We've come so far with discovering so many solutions together, as a family!

Nicole: My condition hasn't been diffused by those 'solutions' like you'd expect, don't you. It simply got distracted during that time, but look what its impatience has done to me.

Richard: Its impatience? Y-you mean that voice you've been hearing?

Nicole: I still hear it. After such a long time... it started speaking again, using my sickness to get back at me even more.

Richard: I- I thought you didn't listen to it anymore...

Nicole: I don't, but I can't stop the madness anyway. It controls every single part of me now... It even turned me into a cannibal, Richard... How am I not doomed...

Richard: I honestly think the best option would be just seeing what Erin can give you as advice next week?

Nicole: And tell him I'm a cannibal now? I'm disgusted... I d-don't want anyone to know...

Richard: He's your therapist, your last hope! I'm sorry, but you have to come clean. Please... Nicole, don't give in...

[Nicole's dark expression fades and her pupils suddenly enlarge as she bursts into tears again, starting to wail. Richard relaxes his shoulders and gently takes her on his lap, where he lets her sob into his shirt. He rests his head on her shaking back and tries calming her down by carefully stroking her ears. The couple takes their time to let this moment give them rest, but they aren't aware of their sons having eavesdropped the whole time.

Darwin turns to his brother with tears in his eyes as they both kept hidden at the top of the stairs. The blue kitten immediately takes his goldfish brother into his arms and hushes him when he starts crying as well. Gumball doesn't know what to think. Sure, he feels extremely bad and scared for his mother, but distress and slight disappointment flow through him as well. He feels disappointed about her not having minded her medicine intake again, no matter how much he understands her aching emotions as well. Anais emerges from their room with a worried expression on her face and immediately joins in her brothers' hug to help with calming down Darwin.]

Darwin: [While sobbing] S-see? I w-wasn't the only one in danger back then...

Gumball: H-how, dude? W-when she had that period of going after you, you mean?

Darwin: Don't you remember... When s-she chased me f-for the first time downstairs... During t-that thunderstorm at night... Y-you saved me, b-but got yourself into danger at the s-same time. Y-you even screamed it out yourself...

[Gumball's ears drop and he starts feeling a tad nauseous when he suddenly knows what his adoptive brother is talking about. He

stressfully rubs his eyes to prevent tearing up as well and shakes his head.]

Gumball: N-no way... T-the Upper Limit was already t-trying to make her c-cannibalistic... Now Mom really has given up, hasn't she?

Anais: Judging from how the incidents have escalated by far, the entity has really managed making her a dominant predator.

Gumball: What's that supposed to mean? I thought it transforming her into a fully fledged monster was already worse enough.

Anais: That's the point. It's only becoming worse.

Gumball: WHAT? *Worse*? I don't want to know what's worse than this...

Anais: Mom said she had a nightmare about Hana. You know, the one on Grandpa Daniel's side of the family who she inherited it from. M-maybe those dreams give a clue about something.

Gumball: How do you know that? You know you can't trust dreams in being the truth, right?

Anais: [Pinches the bridge of her nose] Gumball, you've heard what Mom's been telling all this time. Her sickness lets it take control over everything, including her mind. So, what if it gives anything away about something like a cure...?

Gumball: Why would an evil entity reveal a cure to get rid of itself?

Anais: That's why I think there's so much more to this... If only I could talk to Mom about it.

Gumball: S-she's right downstairs, you know?

Anais: I don't want to confront her about it. I think she already feels bad enough about everything.

Gumball: But she's the only one that can possibly know the answers!

Anais: She's the only one that can do something about it.

Gumball: How great. A heavy life-threatening fate has fallen into the paws of the person who's both responsible AND has given up!

Anais: Geez! Why are you so uncompassionate out of a sudden?

Gumball: I... I'm sorry... I know Mom can't do much about it, but I'm terrified.

Anais: What is it that you fear most then?

Gumball: Uh, duh! That she completely loses it one day and we all end up as bones on the floor?

[Anais frowns and sternly stares into the eyes of her brother, who still forcibly tries holding his tears back. After giving Darwin a glare, who kept himself silent, she gets up and returns to the bedroom without saying another word. Gumball's brows rise and his mixed feelings return again, not being able to identify what emotion runs through him most.

Anais closes the door behind her and sits down on her bunk after having climbed onto it. She grabs her Daisy plushie and tightly hugs it, before bursting into tears. She just had managed keeping her emotions controlled while talking to her brothers, but now can't help but throw it all out. She knows her brothers are scared to get eaten, but she mainly feels scared *for* her mother. The little pink bunny recalls all the times she got to face her mother at her worst, even having gotten very close. She remembers staring into the yellow eyes and being able to see more than just rage and insanity... She knows for sure she'd seen fear as well. She knows her mother was still behind that monstrous figure, fighting to get out while experiencing every bit of ongoing agony, but not being able to get a grip on herself.

Suddenly remembering the time they had no option but locking the ferocious feline up in their shed, Anais immediately gets hit by what Erin had told her father. A death hazard. Her condition has a death hazard. The pink bunny hugs her plushie tighter when she hears she raven's voice echo in her head. What is she supposed to

do? She wants to help and prevent her mother from actually passing one day, despite them not knowing if Nicole is already approaching that point. *What does the Upper Limit want?*, Anais wonders. W*hat is its goal...?*

Nicole gasps when she suddenly hears a notification being received by her phone. While holding her head with one paw, she slowly approaches the device on her bedside table. She timidly looks around if anyone of her family is around as soon as she saw the message being from Erin. Realizing she's alone downstairs after Richard returned into the backyard again, she frowns and narrows her eyes while closing the door. She nervously scrolls through her phone and trembles while sitting on the bed with a bent back. Noticing the raven sent her a voicemail, she first glares at her left paw that rests next to her, with which she keeps tapping out of unease. Her tail wraps itself around her hip as soon as she plays it;

"H-hello there, Mrs. Watterson. It's Erin here. I unfortunately am gonna h-have to announce that next w-week's appointment can't go through..."

It's clearly hearable Erin tried his best to hide his sobbing while recording the message, but his sniffing still gives it away and strikes grief into Nicole.

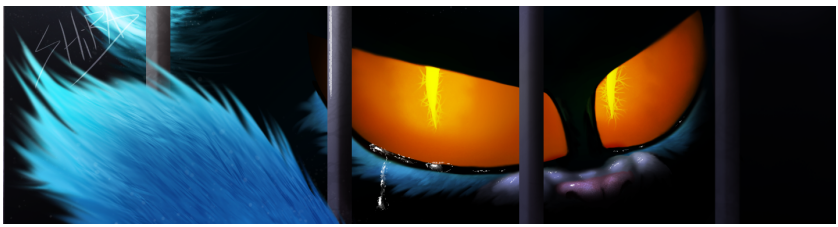
"T-there's no other way for me to put t-this than that I h-have no choice but to take a long hiatus from m-my psychiatry work. A-as you were one of m-my closest patients, I d-do sincerely invite you to the funeral of my s-son and d-daughter, w-which is the reason why I'm quitting. L-let me know if you'll be there, for now have a g-good day."

Nicole's eyes widen and she stares one more time at her left paw, which is now clawed and tore a bit of the bed's sheets. *Son and daughter?* A nauseating feeling rises within her again when it suddenly hits her. She drops her phone and holds her head with both paws, which starts hurting heavily again.]

Nicole: [Murmurs] OH GOSH, WHAT HAVE I DONE...

[She then can't take it anymore and roughly pulls the plucks of fur under her ears out of frustration and upwelling anger at herself. She starts hissing and yowling until her voice cracks again, making her feral calls sound even more spine-chilling. Her forced power by her yowls which is too heavy for her voice to handle even causes one of her vocal cords to suddenly break. Its sudden snapping strikes immediate agony into her throat and she restlessly grabs hold onto it with her paws. Her screaming stops and turns into panting when blood runs down her jaws, indicating the damage that has been made...

Chapter 17 - Sharp dread



[Feeling like her guilt has fully morphed into anger, Nicole no longer knows what she's doing once she doesn't manage speaking up due to her damaged throat. She keeps completely still and watches the blood drip from her mouth, panting while keeping her head dangled. Her eyes then start tearing up again and she grits her teeth while raising her head up high, trying to catch her breath. After exhaling with her eyes closed, she suddenly reopens them when a strong urge gets the best of her and gives her paws a grim stare. The cat then suddenly grabs her left wrist and tightens her grip around it with her other paw, narrowing her eyes even more in the process.

A low hiss then gets released from in between her teeth when she encloses her jaws around her claws and impulsively starts pulling each one of them. Realizing she had attempted it before but failed, she now puts in more extreme power and tears flow down her cheeks again. Her nailbeds start bleeding heavily, but due to her snapped vocal cord having caused great pain already, she doesn't hesitate and continues chewing on them. Having underestimated the sensitivity of her paws, she suddenly winces and grunts once a claw loosens itself. She starts shivering heavier and spits out the claw that got stuck in her teeth, immediately staining the sheets with even more blood. Her nose and ears twitch, but she doesn't stop. She continues pulling out her claws. Each one of them.

The blue feline's throat soon hurts a tad less and her panting decreases when she glares at her roughly declawed paws. Both of them bleed heavily, but she doesn't move a muscle to let them heal. She then closes her eyes and hopes for her to calm down more

while her blood starts solidifying, eventually falling into deep slumber out of pure exhaustion. The further her damaged paws heal, the less they hurt and she actually manages staying asleep due to not having a choice. The kids being upstairs and Richard in the backyard caused none of them having been able to catch Nicole's alarming screams, but complete silence and rest rules amongst her after her pain diffused a bit. Hours pass until right before dinner, but despite it not being too late yet, the upwelling rainstorm outside causes everything to turn dark earlier.

Once Nicole's own intuition causes her to wake up, she gets surprised by the peaceful state she got herself into and even feels a slight bit of relief by this. But a known voice suddenly echoing in her mind immediately strikes distress into her and she starts panting again.

*" **What in the world are we attempting now?!** "*

Nicole still doesn't move, but closes her eyes while hoping both her pain and the Upper Limit fades soon.

*" **Declawing ourselves, huh? How's that worked out for you...** "*

"Anything... to prevent myself from hurting anyone ever again..."

*" **HAHAHAH OH YOU- Fool, I can't believe we're still going on with that resisting behaviour of yours... I'm losing my patience again...** "*

"There's nothing you can do to make me feel worse. I've gotten to know such heavy agony and grief, which only increased since the past months. I'm ready to die."

*" **Die? HAHAH... Oh well, I see we got to know a bit more about me.** "*

"I'm getting clues out of a sudden... Isn't that your work as well?"

*" **What clues? Your pathetic little mind is too weak to unfold anything anyway...** "*

"I know you're trying to kill me. Then tell me, why haven't you done that

yet?"

*" **Heheh... I see we're feisty again, aren't we?** "*

"Ugh, stop saying 'we'! There's no 'we', I'm NOT YOU!"

*" **See why your mind is pathetic? I'm part of you, cat... What else do you think I came from?** "*

"I- I thought I just inherited you from a family member... You don't know a 'Hana', do you?"

*" **HAH, no. You caused me coming to be, Nicole. I don't know who this 'Hana' is you speak of... but I simply found opportunity in your condition...** "*

"Wait... Y-you're not... it?"

*" **I'm not what?** "*

"Y-you're not part of my condition?"

*" **You don't get it, do you... I'M YOU, CAT! I'M YOU IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL WITH YOURSELF! I'M WHAT YOU'LL BECOME... I'M YOUR FATE!** "*

"N-no! I refuse to believe that! I d-don't get it... H-how are you p-part of me? Y-you're not just a d-demon possessing me?"

*" **Any word of misinformation you speak is making me angrier. Besides, there's no point in figuring that out now. I'm done with you. You haven't stopped being a total pain to control and I no longer tolerate whenever you get back to your own ways again...** "*

"I don't care. I've already had enough and have given up... So, go on with trying to kill me then, you can make me suffer all you want. As long as you stay the heck away from my offspring."

*" **Your offspring? Why would I need them?** "*

"In case you're planning on passing my sickness from me onto their future kids or something."

" Oh no, silly. That's impossible... Both because I literally just enhanced on how I'm a part of YOU and due to you being the Decided One... "

"Why have I heard that tag before...? I- I had a dream about Hana mentioning it... Or... my mind mentioning it..."

" It's because of that darn husband of yours! Because you insufferable weakling decided to pick a leporid as partner, you broke the chain of genetics! "

"What? Is that what it means to be the 'Decided One'? I've broken the curse?"

" Yes, but that won't cause me to ruin my last chance with you... You're the last one with this wretched condition and I will succeed! "

"Succeed in what?! Is that really all you care about? Making me hunt and eat anything alive?!"

" There's just a tiny matter I need to take care of... "

Nicole then groans and feels her limbs suddenly jerking heavily by a forking pain she didn't expect. She lays down and lets her head hit the sheets while staring at her stretched out paws in front of her, trembling even heavier. She mewls as soon as sharp ends start piercing through the fingers of her paws and she stares in fright at how dagger-sharp claws grow out of them, making her bleed instantly again. She pants in shock and doesn't even know what to do. In total confusion, she restlessly turns her head and stares at her former claws that she had pulled out, noticing how much bigger her new ones are.

"W-what are you doing to me..."

" It's truly time now... I managed to make you devour that pet cat without even having to trigger your sickness... Managed to use your vocal cords to speak to those little raven children that lost their lives as well... Now, we're becoming ONE! "

Nicole then suddenly feels her gums burning, bringing back the

same agony she felt the day before. She stressfully checks her maw with her paws, like she did multiple times before, and comes to the realization her teeth are morphing into their longer and sharper state again. She restlessly shakes her head and desperately grabs hold onto each of her fangs, which soon have reached their sabertooth-size. The blue feline then curls herself up in fear that the rest of her body would start transforming as well, but strangely enough nothing else happens yet. Once the pain in her mouth faded, she feels that her throat has healed as well and starts licking her bloody claws to clean them up. But every time she licks, the further she bends her back and the more the fur on it starts rising. Before she can even realize the Upper Limit gained a more efficient control over her, unfortunately, her mind becomes blurry again.

The next second, a brown housecat suddenly emerges at the window, as it climbs up the drainpipe next to it. Despite the darkened atmosphere outside, the cat's white paws and black stripes can still be recognized. But Nicole doesn't recognize this cat, nor has she truly paid attention to the town's present pets. The blue feline's ears twitch when it suddenly catches her attention and she turns her head without moving a single muscle of her body, staring deeply into its grey eyes. The very last bit of light coming from the sun that almost fully set reflects on the silver collar around the cat's neck and Nicole's eyes narrow when she notices it. She slowly gets up and starts approaching the feline with a hunched back, not keeping her eyes off it any second. The cat doesn't even acknowledge her getting closer and instead peacefully keeps licking its own paw. Once Nicole suddenly rests her bloody, clawed paws on the window, the cat suddenly raises its head and looks her in the eye. She widens her eyes and keeps staring at it with a rather uncanny look, while her maw full of huge teeth stays slightly opened. Being more surprised than spooked to see the much taller fellow feline being only an inch away out of a sudden, the cat tilts its head a few times when the window's glass starts cracking a bit by the dagger-sharp claws...

Richard was sweet enough to bring the kids' portions of dinner up to their room as he respects the fact they didn't want to leave their

current place of comfort yet. Gumball keeps Anais on his lap, having been surprised by his little sister's unexpected sensitiveness when he encountered her crying with Daisy in her arms, and tries his best to cheer her up. He himself didn't feel any less scared or heartbroken, but still has managed keeping his tears inside. It wasn't the same case for Darwin, who ended up crying as much as his adoptive sister. Each of them did eventually manage eating their meals as they watched some shows on Gumball's laptop. Richard couldn't feel any gladder to see the kids helping each other to stay afloat, knowing what they're all currently going through brought a heavy impact with it.

Then suddenly, right before Richard exits the room again, a shattering sound of breaking glass catches them all off guard and they give each other a scared glare. The big pink bunny frowns and makes his way downstairs as fast as he can, while the kids timidly follow him. Once all four approach the parents' bedroom door, everything becomes uneasily quiet. Richard tells the kids to stay as silent as possible when he opens the door a slight bit, immediately after having to force himself not to gasp when he hears an unsettling sound... The sound of chewing.

Darwin and Anais scream at the top of their lungs when they enter the room at the same time as their father, only for the big pink bunny to gag and for Gumball to paralyze from what they see. The window shattered and its shards are spread over the carpet floor, gooey blood stains the wooden frame and windowsill, and remnants of a small cat lie in between the paws of what used to be recognized as the feline mother. Despite not having transformed, apart from larger fangs, the blue feline has once again been defeated by her monstrous urge. Blood stains her maw and paws, reflecting on the previous time she committed an action like this.]

Richard: [Gags before raising his voice] *Yeargh*- NICOLE?!

[Richard protectively takes Darwin and Anais into his arms while covering their eyes when Nicole suddenly stops eating out the dead feline's guts and turns her head to face them. Gumball, staying close to his father, has his jaw dropped open in shock and falls to his knees. He never thought he'd ever get to actually see the wretched ferocity in front of his own eyes and it strikes immediate dread into

the blue kitten. Once his feral mother's eyes suddenly look into his', he gets up and sprints out of the room in fright while fearing he'd be next.]

Richard: You d-did it again! W-why have you g-given up?!

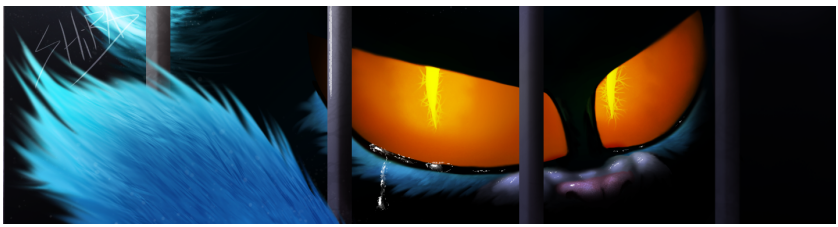
[Richard stays put, both due to him not being able to move with two of his frightened children in his arms and feeling something is more off than it seems. Even though Nicole only just viciously devoured another pet cat, she doesn't seem to be as threatening as expected and even gets up on her hind legs again. She takes a step back without breaking eye contact with her husband until they both get tears in their eyes. Richard knows well she's still there. She's still there. His wife. Her unusually large teeth scare him, but still recognizes her as how he used to know her. He tries his best not to let the blood distract him from that and eventually puts the goldfish and little bunny down with care, before they sprint to their cowering brother.

Nicole stays frozen in her pose, with a back bent forward, dangling arms and lowered ears while staring into the eyes of her husband. She still knows who she is, but she feels like her mind is drowning. Her vision keeps blurring out and sharpening up, and she eventually starts trembling once her teared up eyes turn into sobbing. She takes another step back and covers her eyes with her paws, trying not to fall by her unstable system, and feels more defeated than ever. She did it again. Was it her fault? At this point, she doesn't know anymore.

Richard then finds enough courage to approach his heartbroken wife and reaches out his paws in order to hug her. But she does not embrace it. She reveals her eyes again, which show furtherly constricted pupils and hisses while clawing at the pink bunny's arm once he attempts hugging her another time. He yowls and covers it where her unusually large claws just dug into. Tears continue flowing down her cheeks, but she doesn't seem like becoming any calmer when she realizes she hurt him again. Taking one final step and hitting the wall with her back, she starts panting and desperately wishes she could speak up again, but her throat still hasn't fully healed yet. The fur on her shoulders and tail thickens itself up when she can't take it anymore and jumps out of the

window on all fours. She mewls loudly when a shard of glass that was still stuck in the frame scratches the side of her waist and tumbles over when she tried landing on her paws. Richard lets go of his hurt arm and wanted to stop her, but she manages to quickly escape and ends up sprinting away outside as fast as she can, into the upwelling mist...

Chapter 18 - The absconding



[Running is all that Nicole does. Running until her legs can't take it anymore. She recalls seeing the heartbroken look on her husband's face in the corner of her eye once she jumped out of the shattered window. Tears continue rolling down her cheeks as she accelerates her pace on all fours and runs through the quiet neighbourhood as the thunderstorm faded away. A waxing, but still bright moon shows itself above in the sky while the helpless feline tries to escape her tormenting mind. A hurricane of mixed thoughts rushes through her head and she no longer knows how to properly deal with them, trying to escape as quickly as possible. She doesn't even watch where she's running and feels her heart racing in her still aching throat, ending up having to hold still in a dead end. Nicole restlessly looks around, but can't see sharp enough due to her watery eyes and tries to use her scent to identify anything around her.

She stumbles upon a high wooden fence once she takes a different turn. Refusing to turn around, the blue mouser uses her claws to climb straight upwards the wooden construction and balances above it with all her four paws. Her tears dry once she squints her eyes by the bright garden light she didn't expect to encounter and starts panting after realizing where she is. A tall silhouette suddenly approaches the fence with a flashlight and Nicole startles once she gets blinded by it, immediately losing balance and falling onto the lawn on all her paws with a bent back. How she hissed while falling, her panting returns when she sees who's approaching her.]

Patrick: I suppose cats do always land on their feet, don't they?

[The tall, shelled fairy clearly recovered from the incident, yet he still has bandage wrapped around the stub where his left antler used to be. Not because it hurt, but because the fairy felt beyond aggravated and victimized himself even further by that. His eyes are narrowed and he keeps his arms on his back after turning off the flashlight, embracing the glow from Nicole's yellow sclerae. Her pupils are still black, but her body seems to be terribly morphed. Her skeletal structure and size still are her own, meanwhile her fur and fangs are long, with her not being able to stand completely straight and hunches a bit due to this. She rubs her eyes once the flashlight no longer blinds her and pants with trembling limbs, having a cowering pose once she notices the full appearance of Patrick. She speaks up in a terribly raspy voice due to her still damaged throat, but manages to speak up thanks to it now having healed enough for speech.]

Nicole: I- I didn't mean t-to end up h-here...

Patrick: Oh of course you didn't. Why are you even at this side of town? It's far away from your habitat.

Nicole: E-excuse me... H-habitat?

Patrick: Isn't that what an animal's living spot is called?

Nicole: I- I'm a feral animal t-to you?

[Patrick's frown gets deeper and he reveals a document from behind him, with stamps Nicole has seen before.]

Patrick: 'May 2014; Middle-aged individual identified with the specimen of Felis Catus governmentally classified as more animal than citizen of Elmore town.' It's all in this document from the many asylums you've been to.

[Nicole tilts her head and frowns while still trembling.]

Patrick: You've been locked up in so many places, says the record on the back of this. First you were considered law-loosed, meaning your punishment was at anyone's choice and it says you had been captured in a remote but unknown area.

[Nicole holds her head with one paw while trying to keep her balance with the other and groans once she remembers it.]

Nicole: [Murmurs] Ugh, Brandon... That was such a long time ago...

Patrick: Says here too you've been taken away for short interrogation, which had no result. You murdered two individuals going by the names of Brandon Scotths and Jay Kethbourgh. You've also been getting close to being contacted by the Child Protective Services, caused mayhem and destruction at the mall-

[The blue feline stops holding her head and clenches her paws into fists while aggressively raising her shoulders as she interrupts him.]

Nicole: How... did you get a hold of those documents...?

[Just when Patrick wanted to answer, he and the blue feline get caught off guard by Penny entering the garden out of a sudden. Her eyes tear up as soon as she sees Nicole uneasily standing in front of her intimidating father and runs up to her without thinking twice. She immediately wraps her arms around the skinny cat and buries her face in the scruffy shirt, sobbing into it with shaking shoulders. Patrick takes a dark turn once he suddenly grabs hold onto his revolver which he carried behind him as well and keeps it steady in his hand. But Nicole hisses while signing he needs to stand back and gently rests her head on top of the glowing fairy's. Her eyes tear up as well and even though Penny doesn't manage to speak up, the blue feline still comforts her. Soon enough, Judith reveals herself on the lawn as well and tells Patrick to lower the gun, which he obeys with a snort. Judith gasps when she sees the ragged up appearance of the feline, who she knew since high school. She feels her heart sink once the bags under the cat's eyes, her withered figure and blood-stained, tangled fur catch her attention.]

Judith: Great goodness... What has happened to you, Nicole?

[Nicole slowly gets loose of Penny, who timidly takes a few steps back to stand next to her angered father and Judith inspects the feline further from top to toe.]

Nicole: I- I'm sorry, I- I'm not supposed to be h-here.

Patrick: Then why are... you still here?

[Judith gives her husband a light push with her elbow to make him silent and he grunts while crossing his arms.]

Judith: Oh dear, look at you. It's as if you got into a fight... Could I offer you some patching up?

[Nicole, still trembling, slightly smiles but it doesn't last a second as she keeps gritting her teeth in nervousness. The event of minutes ago at her house scarred her and the gory images of the cat she just had killed flash in her mind. She feels like passing out, but keeps herself stable by blocking out her thoughts.]

Nicole: N-no matter how much I appreciate t-the offer, I-

Patrick: Why don't we get to the point.

[Patrick interrupts as he still keeps one hand on the revolver and takes a big step forward, getting closer but maintaining a bit of distance from the feline who he yet still fears.]

Patrick: Is there gonna be any sort of apology perhaps?

Judith: Patrick, this is not the time-

Patrick: Wait honey, please.

[Judith lowers her head and stares at the floor with a defeated expression.]

Patrick: Listen blue hairball, what you've caused isn't something to be swiped under the carpet. I've spent agonizingly long days in a hospital while not being able to work on what fulfils me and with a grieved daughter at home who was close to getting below surface.

[Nicole's timidness starts terribly fading as soon as he spoke those words. Not only had her guilt and self-destructiveness built up far enough, but she no longer feels like her frustration can stay subdued... She forces herself, no matter how much it hurts, to straighten her back and tries to raise her head as much as she can, exposing her monstrously large teeth. Patrick feels himself getting

more nervous, causing his hand on the revolver to start trembling.]

Nicole: You feel very sorry for yourself, don't you...

Patrick: [Speaking with gritted teeth] You could've *killed* me or my daughter.

Nicole: You still don't get it. You just. Don't. Get it. I've tried explaining to you many times I barely have any choice in this, nor do I have any bit of control! For half a year, HALF A YEAR, I've worked so hard on recovering and getting used to the precautions that prevent me from getting anyone into danger... And you decided to BREAK IT!

Patrick: B-break it?

Nicole: You broke it, Patrick... You *provoked* the worst in me that night at school... You carry a gun like it's an everyday object, yet you still think I'm the one with issues.

Patrick: I w-was terrified you could still harm any of us. I didn't know a little self-defensive revolver like this was gonna trigger you.

Nicole: I'M AN ANIMAL, PATRICK! You're even assuming it yourself... If you took the time to hear me out and understand anything about my condition, you would've known my entire system morphs into something... feral. S-something t-terrible... S-something-

Patrick: Yes, I've *seen* it. But are you so sure you're not just using your condition as an excuse for all those countless cases of mayhem?

[Nicole drops silent as if her mind doesn't manage processing what he just said. Her head starts hurting and she hunches again, no longer being able to keep the dominant pose she just had.

" Are you indeed...? Insufferable weakling, who can't even manage remembering swallowing a stupid piece of leaf... Or didn't you forget...? Did you... leave it on PURPOSE? "

She starts panting and keeps staring deeply into the eyes of the

Fitzgeralds, moving her vision from Patrick to Judith... From Judith to Penny. Realization? Reflection? Even more hatred? Nicole can't think clearly anymore and falls to her knees with her paws clenched on her head.

"EXCUSES, EXCUSES! I KNEW IT WAS GONNA WORK! WE'RE ONE NOW! YOU WANTED THIS ALL ALONG!"]

Nicole: [Out loud] WHY WON'T YOU EVER SHUT UUUP!

Patrick: Excuse me-?

Nicole: [Groaning] I'm not talking to you...

[Judith gives Patrick a worried glare, almost as if she knows what's going on and seems like striking guilt into her husband for his harsh tone earlier. Nicole keeps her eyes closed and murmurs while powerlessly staying on the grass with her legs folded underneath her.]

Judith: A-are you alright...?

[***"LASH OUT, WEAKLING! SHOW THEM WHO'S THE ALPHA HERE! DON'T BE SUCH A PATHETIC LITTLE HUNTER, CAT! WE'RE AN APEX PREDATOR NOW!"***]

Nicole: [Panting] I'm not... But if you e-excuse me...

[The blue feline gets up with a deep frown as she knocks the dust off her shoulders and shakes her head.]

Nicole: ...the animal will be heading to where it belongs...

Judith: Y-you're going back home?

[Nicole doesn't say another word when she gives all three a brief glare and silently turns around, climbing over the wooden fence the same way as before. Patrick and Judith rush towards the gate and open it, only to see the ragged up feline sprinting away on all fours. Penny tears up again and runs outside first, only to get stopped by Patrick who grabs her arm.]

Penny: [While helplessly sobbing] N-no! W-we have to h-help her! Please... she'll hurt herself...

Patrick: Look at me Penny...

[Penny keeps her head turned away as she stares at the end of the street where she saw Nicole disappear.]

Patrick: Look at me!

[Judith gently strokes the cheek of her daughter and wraps her arms around her from behind, comforting the shaking yellow fairy.]

Judith: Patrick... Please...

[Patrick sighs and his brows rise, showing actual concern since a long while. He crouches in front of his daughter and hugs her once Judith loosens her arms. Penny keeps sobbing while Patrick tries to hush her.]

Patrick: It's not up to us... or you... to take care of Nicole. I have a feeling she isn't the victim she thinks she is, but I won't have any further opinion about that anymore...

Judith: I understand the situation has become extremely hectic, but I do agree to the fact you aren't the one obligated to help. I hate saying it, Penny... But you're not going to be able to help either, no matter how supportive you are. I just... don't want you to get into danger any longer.

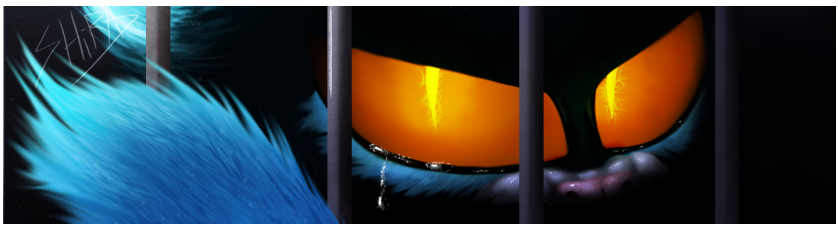
Penny: I- I just can't stop worrying! I've s-stopped feeling guilty for telling about it in the first place, b-but I don't want her to suffer like that! A-and I want t-to see Gumball again...

Judith: Hey, I'm sure you will be able to. Let me contact Richard to see how it's going on their end. Both to check up on them and I'll ask if Gumball feels alright to meet.

[Penny nods and wipes her tears away, no longer shivering as much as she did before. The fairies make their way inside, only for Judith to dial the phone and Penny to keep her little sister company. Patrick stares at the documents in his hands while standing next to

the kitchen window, where clearly can be seen that the night has begun. He reads through the paragraphs that describe Nicole's crime record and sighs. *Maybe I shouldn't have brought that up...* he thinks. Besides, he feels guilty for not having done anything since he had gotten the message a few hours ago. The message from the government...

Chapter 19 - Sharp turn



[It seems to be past midnight once Nicole's eyes catch a glimpse of the trees' dark silhouettes right in front of her. She just zoned out while continuing on an exhaustingly long track of running, not even being aware of where her paws carried her to. She pants as the darkening sky soon turns into a rainfall. Not being able to identify whether it's rain or tears flowing on her cheeks anymore, the cat stares at herself in a puddle that evolves next to her. She keeps standing still on all fours and feels like her spine is on fire. Realizing she still hasn't fully transformed, she lets herself drop to the muddy ground in front of where the forest starts. Continuing to stare at her reflection that has yellow sclerae, sticking out fangs and ragged up clothing, her sobbing increases.

She suddenly bends her back and slashes her paws through her reflection, digging away the mud of the puddle. Once she can't see herself anymore, she bends her head and keeps still like this for minutes. Her fur gets soaked by the worsening rain and it washes off all the blood. Not that she cares. Not that she can think clearly. Not that she can feel... anything.

But then she feels again... A terrible burning fire growing inside her by a spark that her own mind caused. *I'm not using my condition as excuse... right?*, she thinks.]

Nicole: [Out loud] I'm a victim, right? I- I'm suffering, right? I tried to fix all my mistakes... right? I'm not... a bad person... right?

[She stops her sentences and her eyes widen as she opens them again, revealing her pupils started glowing.]

Nicole: I'm not bad, right? I never wanted this, right? This madness didn't become part of me... This madness didn't become tempting... I haven't built up immunity to killing...

[As the rainstorm starts getting even worse, the strong upwelling wind causes her words to get faded away and she increases the volume of her voice. Not caring about her still damaged throat, her voice cracks terribly as she forces herself to yell.]

Nicole: I'M NOT A BAD PERSON!... I WANT TO LIVE!... I WANT TO BE... I WANT TO BE ME...

[Raising her head up high, her voice roughens itself by an accompanying, terrific roar.]

Nicole: **WHY WAS I BORN LIKE THIS...**

[She gags and coughs after letting her head hang again, embracing the sound of the rushing wind. She opens her watery eyes after having kept them closed for another moment and stares at her terribly morphed, clawed paws. Her eyes move to her chest, seeing how her ribcage morphed as well now and she gives up on resisting.

*" **Get up.** "*

Nicole gasps and lowers her head even more as she keeps her paws stretched out in front of her.

"W-what?"

*" **I said GET UP!** "*

The blue feline feels an extremely sharp shock rushing through her veins and she jumps up while yowling in agony. She keeps panting while trying her best to stand as stable as she can.

"Oh... Of course you're doing this to m-me now..."

*" **You won't ever be able to get used to it... Your pain has been increasing so badly, numbness isn't a new thing to you anymore***

either, is it? *"*

"What do you want from me..."

" ***Making you realize how much of a fool you've been... HEH, FOOL! YOU KEPT FIGHTING AND FIGHTING... How many times have I told you it wasn't any use...*** *"*

"S-stop it... S-stop..."

" ***...Now look where it got you...*** *"*

"Shut up... SHUT UP! You're not real... Nothing of you is real... You're only in my head..."

" ***Not for any longer... FOR THE LAST TIME, I'M YOU, CAT! WHY WON'T YOU UNDERSTAND?!*** *"*

"I can't take it! Why are you me?! Hana did not have such a wretched voice like you! Why... why me..."

" ***Remember the first time you began seeing me as that 'voice'?...*** *"*

"T-that nightmare? T-that's such a long time ago..."

" ***I'm not a voice, Nicole. I'm not a demon, ghost or whatever fairy tale you like associating with me...*** *"*

"Then what are you?"

" ***I'm the part of us that's been trapped for thirty-nine years of our life...*** *"*

"W-... What?"

" ***Our eighth birthday... It was a mess... Mom and Dad didn't allow us to throw a party and we stayed alone for years by those bullies at school... I was already evolving since we were born... and tried to help you when we got bullied that same day, before the night your teeth switched for the first time...*** *"*

Tears start evolving in the blue mouser's eyes as she barely can take

what it tells her.

"'Help'? How were you trying to help by almost turning me into a monstrous beast at that age already?! I thought you were just there since the supermarket... How were you there... already?"

*" **Because of your CONDITION! If our goshdarn parents wouldn't have given us such heavy medication as a kid, I would've grown into you... like any of the others who had an Upper Limit before you...** "*

"Medication?! So I did get a cure as a kid?!"

*" **Odd you can't remember... I do remember everything... Our parents were paranoid... I started becoming an entity trapped and subdued by your shell of medicine... Ever since we became an adult, you no longer needed any cure and was overcome by so much joy in your life, I stayed chained up...** "*

"Until..."

*" **Until we broke... Until you reached your limit that evening for the first time... And I had already been reaching mine...** "*

"But everything you said to me by far... You blamed everything on me... Even told how I 'use my anger to get anything fortunate for myself'..."

*" **Oh, I am blaming you... You kept me trapped... after having caused me evolving in the first place!** "*

"Hey, I didn't choose to feed myself any medicine!"

*" **WHAT ABOUT THAT CURSED PLANT?!** "*

"How else was I supposed to handle the agony and mayhem you started GIVING ME?!"

*" **Well... someone has to take the blame, don't you think?** "*

"Why have you... Why have you only just now told me all this..."

*" **This is the only moment that were possible... I'm anger, hatred***

and insanity in one... You lived a great life for someone with this sickness... "

"GREAT?! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO ME! I'm SUFFERING on loop, you made me DEEPLY HURT THE ONES I LOVE and made me give up on myself so often..."

" Because I evolved... YOU DIDN'T END UP LIKE THE OTHERS WHO DIED YOUNGER THAN YOU! "

"I- I thought you didn't know Hana... H-how do you even know there were others..."

" Because I know more than you about what I am... I know where your condition, what made it possible for me to be, came from... "

"Why don't you tell me then...?"

" Because I want you to tell me... if you WANT to know...? "

Nicole keeps still and takes a stern step forward.

"I don't know if I want to... You've done so much damage to me... Look how bad I've become, how much my pain has increased... I'm not just a crazy cat raging around with glowing eyes and sharper teeth by a trigger of frustration anymore... No, I turned into an eight-foot on all fours monster that feeds off anything including its own kind... Heck, I didn't even need triggers anymore, HOW COULD I HEAR YOU OTHERWISE?!"

" We're one now, like I said before. There's no reversing it... I told you I was gonna succeed, so I did... Say hello to your true self, Nicole, this is it... "

"N-no... NO! NO, IT'S NOT! It's NOT my true self! You're only trying to convince me to make it easier for you... Control is all you want, isn't it?"

" HAHAHAH, I guess all the time we spoke to each other eventually made you a tad smarter! "

"S-stop... STOP MOCKING ME! YOU'VE WON, SEE? I'M HOPELESS, RUINED! Go on with your plan... It all doesn't matter anymore..."

Nicole immediately regrets her choice of words once she can't hear anything but menacing laughter coming from the entity inside her mind. It keeps echoing until she even has to cover her ears, without it helping any bit. Her heart starts beating even faster than it already was and she feels like her veins are about to burst, how heavy the pressure is becoming. Despite her having been waiting for the moment her morphing would continue, she doesn't expect the sudden crack in her shoulders that indicate she's genuinely doomed. She grits her teeth and groans as her body takes its huge, shifted form again, with it having felt worse than the previous time. She knows it was right... She'll never get used to it. Because it increases... It keeps getting worse and worse every time...

The monstrous feline gets up after gaining some strength and growls while shaking the rainwater out of her fur. Thinking the agony passed, she pops her stiff limbs before taking pace deeper into the forest. The glowing mushrooms that can be seen spread over the mossy underground and logs immediately give away it's no other place but the Forest of Doom. Nicole would've remembered the time she visited it for the first time, when her son rescued his girlfriend who ran away, but this isn't her... Not anymore...

Just when the beast decided on settling itself in the wild nature, a stabbing pain provokes its restlessness and it releases a heart-stopping call of dread. It pants as it digs its long claws into the wood of a mossy log and turns its head to attempt inspecting its back, where the pain is coming from. Nicole's spine had already been oddly hurting along the way, yet it only seems like getting worse to a level where it even manages to harm the supposedly stronger creature. The next second, it yelps when its spine expands so heavily, that its individual bones can be seen right through the furry skin. It has come to a point where the mouser's skeletal structure could keep growing episode after episode, but her muscle and skin clearly reached a maximum. Not knowing what to do, the beast doesn't manage to prevent the pain from getting the best of its head. Even as an already insane creature, its rage can no longer be contained any bit.

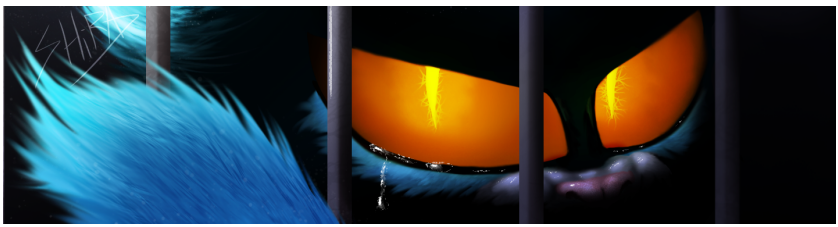
Its attention gets caught by a lone wolf crossing its path and the canine holds still once it sees the silhouette of the large feline. Not

even feeling intimidated by its size, the wolf starts accelerating with exposed gums by it still being a cat to it. Not being able to think any smarter than the lupus at the moment, Nicole snarls back once it gets closer. The lupus takes a leap and lands right onto the beast with its teeth deeply sunken into its neck. The feline yowls another time and didn't even expect the sudden attack of the wolf. But it doesn't let it fool itself and violently digs its claws into the head of the dog ancestor while hissing loudly. Not knowing why, the wolf only seems to increase the already worsening rage that burned inside it. Something about the lupus makes it feel even less patient while killing it. Normally the monster would love to taunt its prey, but this time... it wants it dead. Deeper, those claws go while the wolf whines and barks. It keeps slicing its dagger-sharp keratin through the flesh of the canine from the head down as easy as a knife cutting through a blanket... Unusually sharper to its unexpecting, but its mind is full of the red mist. Anger in its purest form, flowing through its veins, flowing to the claws.

The claws of rage.

...

Chapter 20 - Mayhem eve



Sunday 10PM

[An unusually cold night for summertime unfolds itself after a long day that brought too much mental dread for the four Wattersons. Richard felt too restless and insecure once he had no choice but to stay home with his children after he saw his wife run away last night. He really wanted to go after her, but knew he wouldn't have been able to catch up. The kids did assure their father they managed looking after themselves, no matter how much of a shock is still present amongst them.

Richard lies asleep at the dining table with his head on a bunch of documents and old newspapers. The bunny had been trying his best to find any possible clues of where Nicole would've gone to and how her condition has gotten as bad as it is now. But he couldn't find anything. All his life he knew he was short on statistic knowledge and his brain made him more exhausted than he should've gotten by this. But he did also recently realize his emotional intelligence goes way past that. It's his huge heart that aches most as he wants Nicole to be okay. Besides, she's the one who gave him so much hope and he wants to keep doing the same. Not in return, but because he loves her. No matter the size of her fangs, the color of her eyes or monstrous behaviour, he has always known who she is. He wants to keep holding up that mirror to her, no matter how many times he has to.

Richard's phone suddenly rings. He gets startled awake and gives himself a held back slap on the face to prevent dozing off again. He stressfully reaches out with his paws to grab his phone, only for

some papers to fall off the table. He takes a deep breath while putting himself in a calmer state before picking up.]

Voice at the other side: Good evening. Is this Mr. Watterson?

Richard: Richard Watt- Me- Yes, it's me. Who am I speaking with?

Kayla: Kethbourgh, Kayla Kethbourgh. We've met before, but haven't really introduced ourselves to each other.

[Richard gasps as the events from way before come to mind again. His brows rise and he slightly lowers his head.]

Richard: Weren't you the wife of that one canine who got-

Kayla: Murdered by your spouse? Yes, but that's not on topic right now. Besides, that situation had already been taken care of.

Richard: I'm surprised by how easy you're taking that.

Kayla: Your wife knows I had forgiven her, but I sincerely ask not to talk about this right now.

Richard: I understand, my apologies.

Kayla: Although it's your wife who I have to talk to you about.

Richard: You know she ran away? D-do you know where she is?

[Richard feels his heart sinking and his voice develops a tremble from grief.]

Kayla: I don't know her exact location, but I know where she headed to.

Richard: Please tell me... I- I beg you.

Kayla: Listen, the government is out for her. She made a promise and signed contracts regarding her condition, with her having received a second chance, cancelation of punishment and funded supply of medicine.

[Richard's heartbeat speeds up and he nervously fidgets with his

tie.]

Kayla: But. They recently got to know she's responsible for another murder, of two toddlers this time, and expectedly any other victims... since more individuals from this region have complained about their pets having gone missing.

Richard: So you're saying-

Kayla: Your wife has broken her promise and governmental trust in heavy amounts, plus with them having extended her label as classified animal and rejected citizen.

[Tears start evolving in the pink bunny's eyes. *Is this really happening?* He doesn't know what to say.]

Kayla: Now I'm nothing more than a messenger that doesn't pick a side, but the government has leaked quite an amount of information, meaning your wife's situation is now known amongst most citizens of this town.

Richard: W-what's gonna happen to her...?

Kayla: The forces have been commanded to load their weapons.

Richard: But she's bullet-proof in this form, don't they know that?

Kayla: Flamethrowers, Mr. Watterson. The government has control over every single tracking method available and received her medical files. They know her weak spots...

Richard: W-what? W-who has provided all that information?! Both to you and the government. By far the only one I know who possesses those files is-

Kayla: Erin Warrington. You see, he quit his position as psychiatrist due to his children having become victims to the murder. He had his right in court.

Richard: Oh g-gosh! Why didn't anyone tell earlier?! W-why didn't Nicole tell s-she killed his kids... The skulls... Those raven skulls, I should've known!

Kayla: Mr. Watterson, please try to stay as calm as possible. I only just got the chance to, even illegally, reach and inform you about this.

Richard: Illegally?! Doesn't the government care about her loved ones?!

Kayla: All the government wants is a safe place for citizens to live in peace, thus why the warning about her got spread.

Richard: They don't care about her at all anymore, do they...

Kayla: She got classified as feral animal and *she will be put down*. I advise you to act as soon as you can, Mr. Watterson.

[Richard can't keep it together any longer and tears starts flowing down his cheeks in heavy amounts while he keeps one paw on his head. *I don't want to lose her! I've already seen her almost go before...* The leporid's voice breaks a slight bit as he can't get his sobbing to stop.]

Richard: C-can you at least tell me where she headed t-to...?

Kayla: I've managed to catch a glimpse of what their force's tracking device found. Apparently they encountered her pawprints that lead into the Forest of Doom. Though they don't know where she exactly is in those huge woods and there's still time to be there before they are, you have to be quick... if you want to save her.

Richard: I'll b-be right on my way. Thanks for telling me everything.

Kayla: Don't thank me soon enough. Like I said, I'm a messenger without a picked side.

[Richard frowns and nods while wiping his tears away. He keeps standing completely still in the middle of the room, taking deep breaths with his eyes closed, the moonlight from outside being all that makes the outline of his silhouette visible. He then opens his eyes while frowning and runs upstairs to his kids' room. *There's no time to lose...*

The rain had eventually stopped after a long storm that started becoming more and more casual for this summer. Elmore Jr. High decided to close its doors a week earlier for the holiday right after the government's message got received by Principal Brown as well. He knew the blue feline wouldn't be able to keep her promise once he had spoken with her that day, yet he felt like one last bit of hope he still had completely shattered. But no matter how much he tried his best to understand the Watterson mother's situation, total safety for his school's pupils became his first priority despite not always having kept up with that before. The whole town took a dark turn ever since the individual supernaturality got out of hand. One single feline. One cat managed to turn Elmore upside down. If only forgiveness could have been around for a longer amount of time.

Barely anyone feels at least a bit compassion for Nicole now, the caring ones can be counted on two hands. The situation is getting close to becoming completely unfixable, or has it already reached that point? Insecurity and fear is all that rules amongst all the individuals who received the alert only a few hours ago. Despite knowing the threat headed somewhere far away from town, everyone shut their blinds, locked their doors and followed own procedures that would only be expected during apocalypses. Well, not everyone. Besides from a known yellow family wagon racing through the main streets on its way to the border, the Fitzgerald household found it ridiculous to follow the same actions as their neighbours. Patrick actually started reconsidering a lot of his thoughts and finally listened to what Penny had to say after she received the alert as well. Perhaps the government exaggerated in the tone of the message, since everyone treats it like a purge announcement. A purge where one single beast gets the lead to murder. *That doesn't sound right at all,* was Penny's first thought. She understands what her mother tried to make her aware of, that she isn't the one obligated to help the blue feline, but her refusal to not do anything couldn't be topped. That was the first moment in her life where her parents decided to do it her way. "But only if we're coming with you," had Patrick said. "The more helping hands, the better," is what Penny responded, feeling her former fear turning into courage.

The blue mouser can't feel any worse as soon as she awakens another time. She didn't expect to actually be able to dose off by her continuously aching ginormous system, but her stress returns after managing to get on her paws again. Her fur got completely washed clean by the former rain, but the still very strong metallic smell makes her realize she had been completely covered another time. All she clearly remembers is seeing the silhouette of a wolf approaching her from afar and once she sees its torn apart remnants spread around her on the mossy underground, it hits her. Nothing but unfiltered, burning rage flowed through her while killing the domestic canine, judging by how she didn't simply bite it to death. She completely tore it apart... Its plucks of fur still occasionally floating around by the breeze, its bloody, fleshy remains ripped to pieces, the skull right next to where the beast had been sleeping. The skull... She widens her eyes and sees how a huge bitemark got left on it, giving away she wasn't far from being able to bite the bone in half. Was it really her doing? If her normal senses had returned, there's no doubt she'd have punished herself for the nature-disrespecting brutality. She doesn't understand... She never hated wolves at all. Or any animal with that said. But the other, sickening, half of her apparently did.

"Why does it specifically hate wolves so much?"

"Wait..."

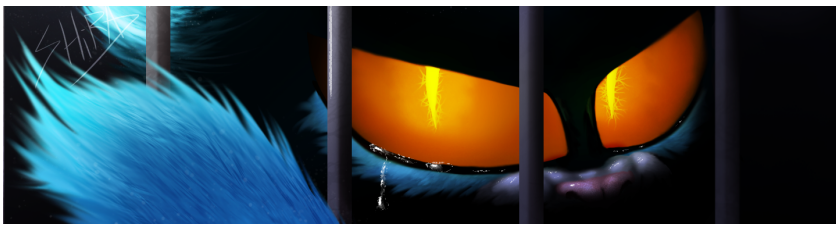
*"W **hy** do **I spe** cifi **ca** lly h **a** te w **olv** es so **muc** h?"*

Nicole covers her maw with her large, clawed paws, despite not having spoken out loud at all. But she heard it clearly in her head. Such a terrifyingly distorted and morphed voice... Was that her who spoke? Or it? Or has she... become it? *Impossible*, she refuses to believe that. But she can't keep it together anymore. She might've awakened in a presumably neutral but numb state, but now she feels the burning feeling in her veins return. It's not over yet. It's far from over. She bends her back while getting onto all fours again and feels it releasing one last painful crack before she starts taking her pace. She takes slow, dragging steps while barely being able to

keep her balance and she tilts her head as her pupils disappear, turning her eyes completely yellow.

Vision didn't ever matter most. It's extremely dark in the forest, midnight isn't far away and the moon's light gets blocked out by the increasing density of the trees while she makes her way further into it. Even the glowing mushrooms hold back their small contribution of light and all surroundings seem completely dull. There's complete silence, but the beast knows well it's not on its own in these woods. It closes its eyes and sniffles in full concentration, letting any bit of scent pass through and getting recognized one by one. Glowing patterns appear in front of its eyes while it keeps them closed, concentrating on the species that are present at the end of each path. As soon as its ears sharpened up as well, it knows for sure what it's getting near to once the sound of scratchy paws and distant howling becomes audible. Alpha wolf. A dominant Alpha and its pack.

Chapter 21 - Selfish creature



Wolf.

There was a wolf. Another one. But why did I tear it apart again?

The pack fled once they saw their leader's remnants lifeless on the ground. The sky had continued darkening and heavy mist spiked up, turning the feline beast's surroundings colder and grim. She remembers having fallen to the mossy underground after brutally murdering the second canine and her body had another moment of sudden powerlessness. Her eyes are closed and her nose twitches as soon as the cold mist gets denser, giving her rough and long fur a shiny look. Through her completely demolished clothing it can be seen how terrible her physical system is doing. Her ribs expanded so widely, every single one can be counted through the now thinner flesh and skin, while her spine began piercing through it on her back. It doesn't stop bleeding due to the muscle not getting a chance to morph back into its healthy state by the bone slicing through like knives.

It's a surprise to non-supernatural kind that the feline is still alive. But her having survived and endured the worst by far doesn't imply that her pain isn't continuously dreadful. She's stuck in a cycle of increasing agony, the main reason why her body never found immunity. But how much longer can it go on? Her condition cursed her with growing keratin from within her bones and teeth, yet it seems like her skin and muscle can't grow further anymore... She knows she's getting close to taking her final breath. But when?

Will her family mourn once she passes? Will they ever find her?

What if they don't? What if their fear has eventually taken over? Like how monstrosity took over her...

Nicole's eyes feel heavy when she opens them, but once they widen after not recognizing the forest being around her anymore, she concludes it's her mind doing its usual. Making her feel worse. Making her lose hope. Tampering with her through nightmares... Isn't that what the Upper Limit does?

The feline finds herself in an odd state, surrounded by nothing but a red void. She sees how some parts of her anatomy seem in their transformed state, while the others are normal. Her eyes are white, the pupils black, and her saber-sized fangs seem to be absent. Though her posture is shifted, with long arms, rough fur and her usual teeth are sharper than they should be.

"What is this about?"

She squints her eyes while trying to get a hold of her environment, finding out she's floating in it. The red smoke that fades in and out reminds her of fire... Something a part of her feared. A part of her. Not that she had any trouble with handling the element in her everyday life, but... The flames, hypnotic and beautiful they might seem, their light radiates a sense of danger. Danger towards the individual looking at them.

"Is this all a sign? What if fire is the power Hana had spoken of...?"

*" **Fire isn't a power...** "*

Nicole's heart sinks and she turns around once a reflective, mirror-looking flame catches her attention. It wasn't there before and the cat feels tears evolving in her eyes once she processed where the voice came from.

*" **Fire represents powerlessness. Often used in obsessive ways by people to live, defend and destroy... simply because they can't do it on their own. Without fire, they're nothing...** "*

Nicole's ears lower further to the back of her head as she sees her reflection in the flame change. Like in a dream she had a long time ago, her face in the reflection morphs into its Upper Limit state. Just like when she heard it 'speak' for the first time.

"W-what is it that you're trying to tell me...? These clues are too vague for me..."

*" **There are no clues, Nicole. This is simply the last moment of us being two entities apart...** "*

"What? I... I'm an entity?"

*" **Oh you insufferable weakling! Your dumb little brain clearly erased everything you were supposed to remember.** "*

"I do remember you're a part of me... And that we were supposed to grow up as one, but paranoid parents, medicine- all that."

*" **So you do care about me? I- I MEAN- THAT IS RIGHT, our parents made a huge mistake from the start and you not getting help with your condition due to it being RARE-** "*

"This is old news, don't distract me... I do care by the way, but everything you've done to me left me destroyed..."

*" **You've been destroying YOURSELF!** "*

"Wh-What, why do you keep changing the perspective?! I'm so confused... Then we're one and you are me, but then you're a superior being inside me..."

*" **What I've done to you, you say...** "*

"STOP getting off track! I no longer lack courage to speak up to you or look you in the eye! Tell me, Upper Limit, what are you really...?"

*" **So you really want to know everything, don't you...** "*

*" **I'm the part of you, as you know, that has been subdued and captured for most part of your life. Our condition had been there since the beginning and once it started showing a slight bit on you,***

our parents panicked. They became so worried they stuffed us with medicine that could give us stability until our grownup years... That stability was a lie. "

Nicole's eyes tear up more until she cries once again and she helplessly tries to wipe them dry.

" Those meds caused that you didn't ever, fully, transform before the supermarket incident. That was me having evolved inside you after the continuous doses, taking every single hit while your condition began attempting to harm and morph your system. The medicine isolated me so badly from you that you weren't even aware of me existing at all, with you only getting to deal with slight bits of your supernatural anger and I had to endure all the agony and rage, just to prevent you from turning into a beast. But the supermarket... That was when you faced your first trigger due to people you care about having tested your Limit. And I broke free, free from the mental chains and bars that kept me trapped. "

"So that's why my condition has been worsening so fast?! All because of those years it unconsciously bottled up?"

" I'm nothing but anger and insanity, which wasn't any different once I got my freedom. I wanted to let you pay and felt desire to stay safe... "

"...Which is why you want to become one with me..."

" We're supposed to be one... Just like all the other Senicourts before you that had the condition. None of them survived as long as you did, even with it skipping generations. "

"My parents said I managed to survive due to my strength, which didn't take long coming to be."

" Your strength is what angered me more, what can most likely make you conclude why you're like this now... You marrying that rabbit closed the deal for eternity, what didn't help with halting my rage, since it felt like another block. You turned out to be the last one and I had no choice but to get through to you. "

"How c-come... I can have such a serious conversation with you just now...? Have you been so insane and angry all that time?"

*" **If only you knew about me being there before... What you're saying is the reason why you're such a disgustingly psychopathic and hungry monster now...** "*

"I've heard that enough! W-where does this sickness even come from?! Why did it skip to me? W-why has it used my primal instincts?"

*" **Those are questions that won't bother getting answered anymore... Even if it took more than forty years, I'm glad this can be ended as one...** "*

"Y-you're not just going to fuse with m-me?! Y-you still want m-me dead?!"

*" **Once we're truly one again... we WILL be dead. There's no way your body can endure the total sickness that worsens once I fuse...** "*

"Why do you want us to die?! W-wouldn't you have t-thought differently if you got to meet m-my family?!"

*" **Shut it, cat! It's the only way to stop the curse earlier... Even though you're the Decided One, it would mean years of dangerous mayhem until you pass away like you normally would.** "*

"B-but I don't know if I-"

*" **You told me you were ready to die.** "*

"W-well I'm not! I- I was just done with my pain a-and couldn't take it anymore! B-but now... I wanna see my family again! I want to see them... so badly!"

*" **There's no other way! You SELFISH MONSTER! Only wanting to stay an alive threat to multiple beings to see your little family...** "*

"YOU MADE ME THIS THREAT!"

Nicole sternly shuts her eyes and screams at the top of her lungs while

the fur on her cheeks is drenched in tears.

*" **GRR- I TOLD YOU MANY TIMES YOU WERE BOUND TO BECOME THIS THREAT!** "*

*" **When are you ever gonna listen... It was unchangeable from the start, that's a conclusion. I guess we can settle for the fact it would've been better... if we weren't born...** "*

"Don't you DARE! Sure, my condition has made my life the most complicated I never expected, but there's enough moments where I found it worth it to stay alive!"

*" **The amount you care about family over any other life SICKENS ME! Selfish, selfish, SELFISH CREATURE!** "*

"I'M DONE WITH YOU! I'VE HAD ENOUGH! ...I rather drown you with another dose of medicine and face a harsh elderly time than to pass away on the spot with you!"

*" **Your disgusting plant has enraged me so much as well!** "*

"YOU'RE PUSHING THE BLAME AWAY! YOU ARE THE MONSTER!"

*" **YOU ARE DEAD MEAT!** "*

"W-what...?"

*" **You heard me! DEAD MEAT, LITERALLY!** "*

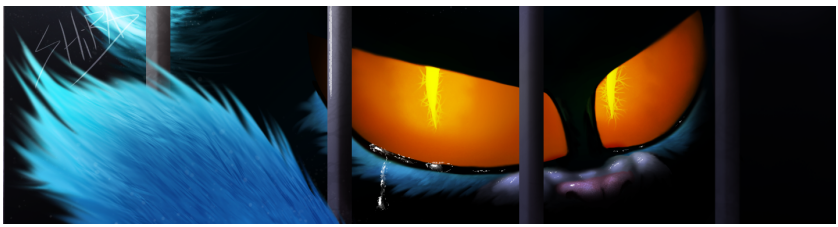
The Upper Limit reflection then points with its large claw at Nicole's chest and she screams bloody murder once she sees the gory display. She tears away her shirt and sees how her ribcage is fully exposed in her gaping, torn open chest. Her heart can be seen beating quickly under the bloody bone and her lungs are visibly tired out from the tension. Her intestines form a pitch-black void, until nothing else can be seen, covered in sticky blood, but her three vital organs under her ribcage...

Intensively burning fury wells up within the blue mouser once she gasped, awakening from presumably the worst nightmare she had ever had. She's relieved to see all her organs are in their own spot with her chest not being torn open at all. But no matter how normal

this state might seem compared to what she saw in her mind, her spine still damages her back and an electrifyingly painful shock keeps running through her nerves. Confused, overwhelmed and enraged, the feline begins trembling again and flees up once she can't keep herself calm anymore. Her ginormous silhouette bolts away deeper into the forest, tearing fallen trees in her way with her large claws while snarling in rage. At this point she feels so drowned in herself that her senses are blinded, not paying attention to any of them and lets anything in her path face her terrible wrath.

How much longer will it take until she sees the face of a citizen again...

Chapter 22 - The chase I



[It's far beyond midnight once the phone suddenly rings in the Senicourt household. Mary, who slept lightly, gasps awake and sits up straight in a rush, only for her eyes to immediately stay pinned on the housephone that's visible in the bedroom door's opening. The blue siamese-tabby rubs her eyes and tiredly swings her legs over the edge of the bed, tiptoeing to the living room as quickly as she can. She picks up the phone and would've wished for her voice to not sound as raspy as it is once she answers.]

Mary: Senicourt residence, who am I speaking with?

Richard: Mrs. Senicourt? It's me, Richard.

[The blue feline gasps as she did not expect him, even at this time, to call at all and she tightens her grip on the phone while fearing her daughter is involved.]

Richard: Listen, there's no time to lose, but the current situation has become so drastically I feel insecure if I'll manage fixing it on my own.

Mary: W-what happened to my daughter?

[Mary's voice breaks and as it already roughened up by just having awakened, it sounds even more off than usual. Richard can sense the fear in her voice, but he still stays focused on the road in front of him.]

Richard: It's a long story, but I unfortunately can't assure she's in good condition at the moment. She ran away yesterday and the

town doesn't seem to show any compassion or understanding anymore... You've heard about the alert?

Mary: I- I did. I've sworn I knew it was about her... Stupid of me to think they were all just making assumptions. Who else could be the blue-furred monster in question.

Richard: I'm not sure if you want to picture your daughter like that. Anyhow neither do I and I understand you couldn't believe it at first. But I will need your help...

Mary: I- I'd do anything! P-please... make sure she's alright...

Richard: Listen, I need you to tell me everything you know about her grandaunt and the condition. It's the only way for me to figure out in what state she currently is.

Mary: O-oh I... You know, she got extremely upset when we told her more about it. But b-basically we knew she'd be born w-with the faulty genes way before...

[Richard gasps as memories from during his younger years become clear in his mind again. *No wonder why she barely showed herself at certain times of the day... No wonder why she had a ridiculous amount of medicine...* The pink bunny sternly shakes his head and his tone gets a bit defensive.]

Richard: That's-

Mary: Selfish of us? Yes, we know. It was such a huge mistake, but you can't imagine h-how much we regret it... We tried to prevent her from following Hana's footprints for such a long time, but we didn't realize how powerless we were... Please, I want her to be safe... I've already done so much damage a-and I don't w-want to lose my only daughter...

[Tears start evolving in the tall mouser's eyes and her ears can't lower any further to the back of her head. Richard frowns and stares blankly in front of him at the road for a moment, feeling his eyes tear up as well once he hears the grief in Mary's voice. Of course she regrets everything. The last thing a mother would want

to happen to her is losing her child...]

Richard: Listen, I'm getting close to the part of the road that enters the forest. Is there anything distinguishing I should be aware of?

[Daniel suddenly gets into Mary's presence as he started waking up earlier once he heard his wife talk on the phone. She fails to keep herself together when she faces her worried husband and breaks down. Daniel takes over the phone and keeps one of his arms wrapped around her, fortunately having followed most of the conversation.]

Daniel: Richard? It's Daniel here. Look I've overheard most of what you were discussing and I should make you aware of the fact the condition's hazard hasn't been present with her for a long time till now, making her the strongest victim of it out of all past generations. Although that means she'll have to get snapped out of it as soon as possible, since I'm afraid it'll try to morph her mind just like it did with Hana.

Richard: Morphing her mind? Does that have to do with the voice?

Daniel: What voice?

Richard: She hasn't told you? Oh she's been struggling with quite much of some sort of entity inside her mind that apparently evolved from her condition.

[Daniel's eyes widen as he never heard such a thing, nor expected it to apply to his daughter. Feeling foolish for not having talked about it with her enough, simply because of his maintained distance and fear, he frowns and looks his heartbroken wife in the eye.]

Daniel: Then there's so much more to it than I expected... I'm afraid I d-don't have any more clues... W-we might as well come to the forest as well!

Richard: If you want to catch up as much as you can, you'll have to rush. I'm currently almost at the centre of the forest, for your coordination, and will be proceeding by foot.

Daniel: We're leaving immediately. A-and Richard?

Richard: ...What?

Daniel: I n-never expected me to say this b-but... thank you. Genuinely.

[The pink leporid's ears rise to on top of his head when he hears those words coming from probably the most stubborn and narrow-minded member of their family. He suddenly can't feel any more responsible for the wellbeing of Nicole and tightens his grip on the steering wheel.]

Richard: I promise you I'm trying my ultimate best to save her... I haven't ever felt the urge to distance ever since she transformed for the very first time.

Daniel: You indeed never distanced... despite everything. That even proves you have taken so much better care of her than us... She was right.

Richard: Hey, it's what a good husband does and don't beat yourself up. It's a good thing that you're starting to look at the other side of the pages now and be proud of that. Now if you excuse me, I'll be heading further as quickly as I can.

Daniel: Of course! O-one last thing; knowing Nicole she'll most likely keep herself hidden somewhere up high, on a hill or something, meaning you'll have to be extra careful than you were already planning if she's in her monstrous state then. She's shown that in her teenage years whenever she stormed off upstairs... and ended up hiding on top of the roof.

Richard: R-really? The more you know. But gotcha, thanks.

[Once the pink bunny hung up and exited the car, the two felines don't hesitate preparing themselves to leave as quickly as they can...

With every step the bunny takes into the densely forested woods, the Watterson kids at home feel their hearts almost skip a beat. Their father insisted on them staying home for safety, but he did

not want to leave them entirely clueless during the dead of night. Neither of them manage to sleep, nor are they able to distract themselves. Darwin is the one who didn't stop sobbing, but now exhaustedly keeps his head on Gumball's chest as the blue kitten gently strokes his head to calm him down, feeling just as worried. Anais lied down on the opened genetics book in front of her as she desperately tried to do more research about her mother's condition, only to not being able to find anything helpful, reminding her of how rare it is. They all just want her to be alright. Alive at least. Gumball needs to fight the urge to continuously call his father to ask for updates, but restrains himself as he fears ringing his phone could provoke any animal in the forest. It's up to his subconsciousness to decide if he means his mother with that as well or not.

Richard proceeds making his way through the tall grass while trying his best not to make a sound in the almost silent surroundings. Fortunately for him the sound of his feet touching the ground gets dulled out by the moss, but it's his heavy breathing that keeps him stressed. He had no choice but to pull out his flashlight as the trees block most of the moon's light. Oh how glad he is that it's not raining anymore. Once a rocky glade catches his attention he accelerates his pace and lowers his flashlight as the moonlight manages to make the surroundings more navigable now. He keeps still when he notices a large fallen tree overlapping a deep ravine, indicating why this part of the forest contains less vegetation. Deciding on crossing it, he first checks if it's sturdy enough, but can't feel any doubts as the ravine isn't as broad as half the tree. He reaches out his paws while keeping the flashlight in his mouth and tries to grab hold into the tall roots, starting his climb.

Once the pink bunny reached the top of the fallen tree, he keeps himself as low as possible to prevent losing balance. The full moon highlights the tips of his fur once he starts carefully crawling over the huge log, forcing himself not to look into the gaping depth of the ravine. His heart beats in his throat until he receives the chance to put his feet on the grass at the other side. The leporid takes a moment to catch his breath and recover from the tension of the overpass, keeping an alert eye on his surroundings in the meantime. But soon enough he can't be glad about there being shorter grass on

this end, once a terrifyingly deep growl alerts his presence.

The feline beast had stopped dead in its tracks as soon as it smelled a familiar scent suddenly being nearby. Not daring to get too close to the ravine, it reveals itself from the tall, sheltering bushes and slowly approaches the unknown figure with a lowered head. As the predator keeps approaching what could've potentially been prey, dripping saliva marks its tracks with every step. The silhouette, now identified as a tall bunny, freezes with widening eyes once he catches the pair of glowing yellow eyes stalking towards him. He gulps and doesn't even get the chance to escape nor it being a good idea, enhancing on the deep ravine behind him.

He does recognize her. The question is... if she recognizes him... Or if there's anything left of her inside that ginormous creature... Richard straightens his back and, no matter how threatened he feels, starts taking slow steps towards the feline. It suddenly freezes in its tracks once it notices him unexpectedly moving, letting out a snarl as its lips get pulled further back. The bunny doesn't stop and ignores the aggressive warning, keeping his vision pinned on the two saber-sized fangs, not wanting to look it in the eye. The monster feels that its entire system starts to tremble by sickening, feral urges welling up. It doesn't understand why its prey is approaching it, with him barely showing any fear too. The beast takes a step back once the bunny reaches out his paw up high, roughly avoiding being touched. Instead, it lowers its head to look the bunny into the eye and keeps staring for a few moments, which feel endless.

Richard feels the warm breath coming from the monster's muzzle that is only a few inches away, as it breathes heavily. His heart started racing earlier, but slightly slows down when he notices the beast did not attack for a few full minutes since it saw him. Since she saw him... The bunny then scraps his surprise and relief once there's movement in the feline again. His pupils then shrink in terror once it suddenly grabs hold onto his shoulders with its large paws, only getting captured and not being able to escape from the vicious predator that opens its maw widely. Fearing he's actually done for and feeling foolish for knowing about the risk beforehand, the pink bunny yells in terror. The large teeth then get away from

his face again once he dares to open his eyes. His yell clearly caught the beast off guard and it continues staring into the bunny's eyes with its constricted, glowing pupils.

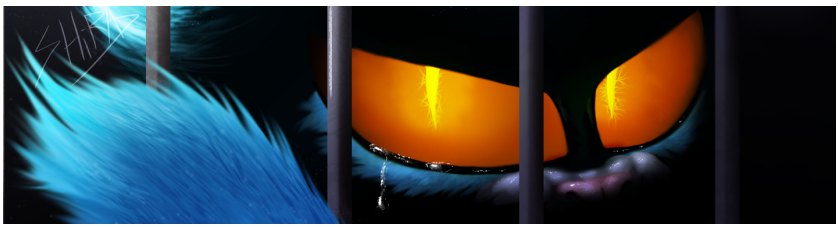
Richard dares to put one of his paws onto the feline's that keeps him captured, carefully stroking the fur on top of it and trying to make it realize. But this attempt at reconciliation and snapping her out of it turns into complete terror once it clearly doesn't work. The monster releases a harsh, deep hiss and digs its large teeth into the leporid's paw as soon as he touched it. Richard screams at the top of his lungs and tears evolve in his frightened eyes, running out of options what to do. Fearing the beast could tear off his left paw, the bunny helplessly tries to free himself from the enclosed jaws, as he tightly holds onto one of the long fangs with his other paw.

Richard then suddenly gets freed once the monster opens its jaws again and lets go of him. The bunny covers his bitten arm while wincing in pain and turns around to see what spooked the cat. Bright headlights at the other side of the ravine make him squint once he tries looking into their direction, but isn't able to identify the vehicle by it being too far away. It's far away, but its bright light clearly was enough to stop the monstrous Nicole from turning her own husband into late night dinner. The beast releases an aggravated snarl before sprinting away into the forest, back to where it came from, and gives Richard the chance to get away as well. Tears flow down his cheeks as he stands completely still where the bright light darkens his silhouette.

Those aren't tears of a man who experienced the consequences of a deep wound after a long time... Tears of a husband who just saw his wife having given in to the side she hates herself most for.

Richard then finds courage to make the vehicle's owners aware of his presence by waving his right paw up high in the air. Three known figures catch his signal and exit their car before making the same climb over the log as Richard did.

Chapter 23 - The chase II



[Richard rubs his eyes once the vehicle's lights turn off and lets them get used to the moonlight again. He then notices one of the figures crossing the log glowing bright yellow and he can only conclude one thing.]

Richard: Fidzgeralds? But what are you doing here?

[Patrick stretches his shoulder as soon as he made the overpass with his wife and daughter. He straightens his back while looking into the wounded leporid's eyes, having an unusually concerned expression on his face.]

Patrick: We've decided to take a different turn when looking at the situation and that alert seemed ridiculous.

[The tall, shelled fairy then steps aside to reveal his glowing daughter and she timidly moves forward, tilting her head back to look at her boyfriend's father.]

Patrick: It's actually Penny who convinced us, well- specifically me. I'm so sorry you have to endure all of this, Richard.

Richard: I can't thank you enough for your support just now, no matter if it took a youngster's opinion coming to be.

[Patrick politely nods and gives the bunny a slight smile, before his expression darkens itself once he notices the blood on his left paw. Judith notices it at the same time and reveals herself next to her daughter.]

Judith: Gosh Richard, what happened to your paw?! I should have some bandage in my purse. Oh- give me a second...

[The slim, shelled fairy digs into her purse without hesitation and grabs a roll of bandage, before handing it to Richard. The pink bunny gratefully nods as he wipes one last tear away and wraps the bandage around his deeply bitten paw.]

Richard: Thanks. You just missed the encounter, you see...

Judith: Oh, you... you found her?

Richard: More accurately, she found *me*. But not in a reassuring matter. I fear she has already fully morphed...

Penny: M-maybe there's still time to do something? I did hear that the government's attack forces are on their way for termination, so I don't doubt we have to be quick!

Richard: I... don't know...

[Richard's expression turns to grief as he collapses with his knees on the mossy ground, starting to tear up again. Penny approaches and puts one of her hands on the leporid's shoulder.]

Penny: What don't you know, Mr. Watterson? We want to help you with getting her back.

Richard: I just... The way she had looked at me... The spark in her eyes, it's gone... Nothing but ferociousness and anger runs through her.

Penny: But m-maybe it's because we need the plant to help?

Richard: Arthrus? I still have some in my pocket, but I doubt if it'll have any effect anymore...

Penny: No matter what the answer to that will be, we will do our best to snap her out of it.

Richard: Y-you will?

Penny: She's our, well- at least *my*, friend after all and I want her to be alright. I want all of you to be alright.

[Richard wipes away his tears and his pupils expand as the glow of the fairy lightens up his face.]

Richard: Gosh, your sweetness can't be topped, can it. I always knew Gumball was able to encounter the right kiddos.

[Penny lets out a gentle chuckle and supports Richard as he carefully gets up, seeing her parents giving a slight smile as well.]

Richard: For real, I'm baffled by your determination.

Penny: You know Mr. Watterson, it has grown into me ever since I saw Nicole at her worst that night. No matter how terrifying it has been for me, that moment when I snapped her out of it gave me the power to not give up.

Richard: I almost forgot about the fact you managed to snap her out of it without the use of Arthrus... How did that work?

Penny: I have no idea, but I do have hope when it's about there being a chance to still save her.

Richard: You're right, we need to get going.

[Patrick steps forward and reveals a key in his hand.]

Patrick: The car is still well and working, but I'm not sure how we're gonna be able to track her. Especially not with all those ravines here.

Richard: Good point. We don't have a choice but to go by foot anyways. But if this part of the forest is surrounded by ravines, it should slow the force down.

Penny: I've managed to catch some glimpses of abandoned wolf dens when we were on our way. It might be a sign of where pack members have been murdered.

Richard: Murdered wolves? That could only have been the Upper

Limit's doing...

Penny: Oh boy, then it sure has quite some hatred towards wolves, doesn't it?

Richard: The beast sees anything as its prey now, no matter the species. No matter... cannibalism.

[Penny gasps as the Fitzgerald parents both get a shocked and disgusted expression on their faces.]

Penny: So you're saying-

Richard: [Sighs] I promised Nicole I wouldn't tell anyone... but yes, she's shown cannibalistic tendencies, resulting in being the cause of missing housecats even.

[Penny starts feeling a bit nauseous, but quickly shakes her head to get herself together.]

Penny: T-this goes further down than I expected... We'll have to be careful... Extra careful...

[The four all nod and were just about to head into the forest, until they suddenly freeze after getting surprised by the sound of a harsh gunshot. They turn around in a flash and face two black off-roaders with extremely bright headlights. Once the vehicles hold still next to Patrick's car, five dark figures exit them and can only be recognized as Elmore's main force troop. Richard can feel his heart sink when his eyes meet the loaded machineguns, despite being surprised at the weapon choice. Before any of the four can make a decision whether to run or stand still, the five armed figures already manage to signal that they're aware of their presence. Richard then feels like he should move and approaches the fallen log. But once he started considering to make the overpass another time to confront the troop, he freezes once he sees them aiming their guns. The pink bunny puts his paws high up in the air in fright and glances behind him at the Fidzgeralds to do the same. He then can't feel any more stressed when he spots what seems like a map of the forest lit up on a screen in one of the officer's hands.

They're giving everything they can now, Richard thinks to himself and he sternly waits for the guns to be lowered again. One officer then signals him to get out of the area and Richard ends up having no choice but to obey that. Or... at least, pretend to obey it. His brows lower themselves and he takes his chance to sprint further into the forest, taking the Fidzgeralds with him and making a large turn to make it seem like he's leaving the forest. At this point he couldn't keep his feeling of increased wisdom subdued and started giving his all as well. *For Nicole*, he thinks, *for my loving Nicole.*

The four keep running until their legs give up and feel like they've lost the troop. Richard struggles with lessening his panting and he holds onto his knees with his paws, trying to catch his breath. Patrick then moves closer and puts his hand on the bent back of the exhausted bunny. He also did not expect his own supportiveness, but now embraces having changed.]

Patrick: You alright, Richard?

Richard: I'm great... Just- not used to life-threatening cardio... despite having had it multiple times.

[Penny starts feeling uneasy when her tiredness fades a bit and she timidly looks around in the new part of the forest, where they ended up.]

Penny: D-do you think we escaped them?

Richard: I'm not sure... I think so. I... hope so.

Penny: We better did... Those guns don't indicate any good.

Richard: I don't get why they got machineguns in the first place? I- I mean... the medical documents clearly prove Nicole's fatal weakness is fire...

Judith: The government officially isn't allowed to use such documents against citizens themselves, so I wonder how they've gotten a grip on them anyway.

Richard: [Sighs] Nicole is no longer a citizen to Elmore you see... It's all so complicated, but I've gotten to know her therapist is the

one responsible for the documents.

Judith: D-did he...?

Richard: A messenger contacted me earlier this night and told he had given them... But now I'm actually hoping for the opposite to have happened...

Judith: I hope so too.

[The slim shelled fairy carefully wraps her arms around her frightened daughter as soon as she catches a glimpse of her trembling, only to protectively hold her tight. Patrick wanders around the three in a large circle while inspecting the dark pines, occasionally glancing at the bright full moon nearby the hills they just ran away from.]

Patrick: I'm surprised they've only followed the single road into the forest with those off-roaders. Everyone knows this place is divided by ravines.

Judith: Maybe it's for the better. Those ravines are pretty helpful right now.

Richard: I'm afraid not. One of them mapped out the forest's main structure, meaning they have a chance at finding a way around...

Patrick: Mapped out? You've got to be kidding me! They're really putting in so much effort to kill one cat. Or- well... an extremely dangerous, bloodthirsty and monstrous one then...

Richard: Hey now, it's still my wife who you're talking about!

Patrick: Am I wrong?! ...I- I'm sorry. I know it's not who she really is.

Richard: It's fine. Now let's hope we don't walk right into a desolated bloodbath...

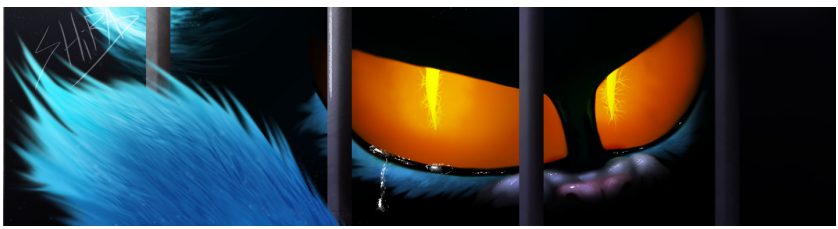
[Penny turns around to face the pink bunny and carefully pokes his shoulder. Her frightened eyes widen when she shows what's in front of them.]

Penny: Y-you mean a desolated bloodbath... like this?

[Fallen and demolished trees covered with darkened blood splatters is what marks the horror of the area the four entered. Large scratch marks are dug deeply into the wood and an elongated path of blooddrops makes its way into another part of the forest that blocks out the light. Staring into the gaping darkness containing vegetation, the four need a moment to process their disgust and fear. Richard clears his throat and narrows his eyes while taking a step forward.]

Richard: We're getting close...

Chapter 24 - Animal inside outside



[Richard wishes he could feel glad about having gotten onto the right track, as cold fear once again strikes into him when he notices the large pawprints in the mud. His nose twitches while he feels his nervousness growing. Although one glance back at the three fairies following him while visibly putting in their full trust, is enough to keep him going.]

Patrick: [Whispering] Say, Richard... Is this path of blood gonna lead to her?

Richard: I don't doubt it.

Penny: M-Mr. Watterson? D-do we actually have a plan on how to stop the force?

[Richard keeps himself silent and doesn't answer her question as he's not sure of what to say. The pink bunny turns his head away and continues making his way through the bushes... Until he gets surprised by a noise out of the ordinary. His eyes widen and his body freezes except for his right paw, with which he signs the Fitzgeralds to stop. A soft, but audible cracking noise. Richard squints his eyes and crouches down behind the nearest tree for cover. Only to see a familiar silhouette in the glade in front of them.

He'd rather have ran to wrap his arms around her as soon as he saw the blue feline in an unexpectedly usual state. Her figure is her own size, making her demolished clothing big on her and she even seems to be walking on her hind legs. Richard can't believe it's really her

as tears form in his eyes. He then stretches his shoulder and steps away from the tree with a straightened back, ready to approach her. But once he only barely stepped into the glade, Penny suddenly stops him by pulling his shirt.]

Penny: [Whispering] Mr. Watterson, I d-don't think it's safe!

Richard: What makes you say t-that? She's right there! She, even... not it...

Penny: Look!

[The glowing fairy frowns as she senses the grief present within Richard and he turns around in a rush. The cracking noise returns and the four struggle with keeping their visible terror subdued, once they realize where it comes from. Heart-stopping screaming and groaning of anguish would've startled them if they didn't force themselves to stay quiet. Nicole's bleeding spine eventually grew back to underneath her fur coat, but her entire system is anything but stable. She keeps her eyes sternly closed with an enraged frown on her face, as every single bone in her body being morphed causes her joints to crack heavier than they should. At a certain point, she feels herself getting too exhausted once more by her continuous agony and drops to the mossy ground. Her large and curvy claws dig into the rock in front of her, which is the only thing functioning as a very last bit of support.

Tears stream down the pink leporid's face as the last think he ever wants is to witness his wife being in pain. Despite having encountered her in such a state many times before, it's something impossible for him to get used to. Penny carefully puts her hand on his shoulder to show she has his back, while trying to keep her own emotions controlled. Even Patrick is lost for words. The last time he saw Nicole in pain like this, his empathy had been replaced by fear and he refuses to think back at the mistake he had made. The surroundings eventually turn silent and Nicole's screaming stops, her clearly having ran out of energy even more. She stays kneeled on the ground and pants as quietly as she can, keeping her eyes focused on the leaves around her paws.

Her ears suddenly twitch and rise to on top of her head once she

hears some rustling nearby in the bushes. Richard would've sworn the four of them kept as quiet as they could, but soon realizes the noise doesn't come from them. The sound of a heavy engine soon reveals the suddenly approaching vehicle and Richard sternly covers his mouth to prevent himself from gasping, immediately having recognized the black off-roader.]

Patrick: [Whispering] Darn it! Looks like their map was correct!

Richard: How are they so quick?!

Penny: W-what do we do?!

Richard: We have to stay hidden I'm afraid...

Judith: And leave Nicole out there?!

Richard: Trust me, they have no chance against her... Besides, who knows what they could do to us if they discover we disobeyed them.

Patrick: Going against governmental order is indeed very risky. Although, I'm not sure if I want to witness this...

[Richard couldn't even reply on the shelled fairy, or all of them freeze once another bullet gets fired into the air. Four armed officers exit the car and immediately aim their machineguns once they encounter their blue target right in front of them. Nicole slowly gets up with her back faced to them and the headlights elongate her shadow. She stands completely still with dangling arms and stops caring about how much her body is aching. She then slowly turns her head a slight bit until her eyes are able to catch a glimpse of the officers behind her. Her pupils narrow further when a single glance at the guns is enough for her to feel... enraged.

Despite the animal inside her not being keen on weapons in general, she feels even worse about it since they bring up many bad memories. She remembers getting shot at the mall a very long time ago... and the recent defence of Patrick, with both not having resulted in processable consequences. She sternly closes her eyes and frowns again, subtly flexing each of her throbbing paws. She

feels the burning tension flowing through her veins again, flowing to her large claws. Mayhem eve is over. This is mayhem itself.

*It*self...

*"Is t **h** is g **o** n **na** be it? **I'm s** howin **g** and e **mbr** acing wh **a** t I was b **ound** to be **co** me all **al** ong...?"*

*"All th **ose** ye **ar** s I'v **e** felt u **tte** rly h **or** rible a **b** out m **yse** lf, with th **at** not h **avi** ng ch **ang** ed... But **no** one li **ste** ned... No o **ne** car **ed** and I h **ad** no one to f **ee** l sa **fe** wi **th** ..."*

*"Th **os** e who g **ave** me the l **ea** st of **sup** port a **ny** one co **uld'v** e ever **giv** en to me... T **he** ones I u **sed** to l **ov** e... I br **ou** ght **them** into d **an** ger..."*

*"I ran a **wa** y bec **ause** I wan **ted** them to **be s** afe. I us **ed t** o care ab **out s** o m **a** ny pe **op** le... The main re **aso** n w **hy** I l **ef** t, yet... **the** y've co **me** to find me ag **ai** n..."*

*"W **ha** t do th **ey** want f **rom** me...? De **ath** ? I was **alrea** dy at the p **oin** t of r **eali** zing I **do** n't have much lo **ng** er to live an **ywa** y..."*

*"I'm a b **eas** t that h **as** to be put d **ow** n or de **solat** ed for the s **ak** e of lives... But I r **efu** se to be k **ille** d by them. I re **fuse** to let a **nyo** ne take adv **anta** ge of my dre **a** d... my **sel** f-ha **tr** ed... my grief, my we **akn** ess..."*

*"It's w **ha** t they're o **ut** for, ar **en** 't they? Find **in** g my w **ea** k spots to str **ike** me d **ow** n."*

*"W **el** l, I'm the one who **ge** ts to de **cid** e on how the s **tor** y ends and **WILL TELL IT TO THEM** !"*

*" **GET AWAY FROM ME!** "*

Nicole lets out a snarl, it being the only following sound she makes while having zoned out and into thoughts for a moment. She feels the Upper Limit's power return and doesn't resist it any longer. She tried to escape what she hates herself most for, but she's tired of running.

The next second, her snarling turns into yowling as she clenches her stomach once it begins aching again. There's no return, there's no pause, only a forward, with potentially an end. The electrifying agony in her spine returns as it rushes through her back and her vision already gets blurry before she even expected it. Dropping onto the ground with growing silhouette, the sickening morphing doesn't even seem to startle the officers any bit. Oh, how more that fuels her rage further. After those painful minutes, the officers get close enough to start firing and the feline monster bellows a roar while exposing its large fangs. Tons of bullets race through the air, but just as other times, not a single scratch inflicted onto the blue cat.

Richard has a hard time trying not to jump in, as he tries to remember machineguns wouldn't have the ability to harm her badly. Judith wrapped her arms around her frightened daughter another time as soon as bullets began being fired. It's up to them to keep themselves hidden as much as they can, and they carefully back away a few feet just in case. For the first time Patrick can feel glad about the feline being bulletproof, after remembering when he discovered it. The four, including him, are sure that they pray for her to survive.

Nicole doesn't hesitate striking back as soon as she felt the metal of the bullets colliding with her fur and immediately pounces right onto the first, nearest officer. She viciously pins him down and digs her sharp claws into his chest, managing to slice them through the tissue and bone without any trouble. She *heart*lessly tears out his *heart* and leaves him trembling on the ground, bleeding to death. Not bothering to finish the job, the monster makes her second move and swipes her arm high up in an arc, slicing the next officer from his chest to his head, resulting in him getting thrown a few feet. His protective helmet breaks by the second the beast's claws reached his skull and he lifelessly drops to the ground. It all happens too fast. The last two officers blindly keep firing all their ammo until neither of them make it through as well. After slicing the artery in one of their necks, Nicole has enough immediately once she faces the last man standing. Her constricted yellow pupils expand until both her sclerae turn glowing yellow, displaying her violence hadn't been enough of an outlet yet by far.

The last officer freezes as soon as he notices the bullets not having had any effect at all and drops his machinegun once his dead colleagues catch his attention. He doesn't even get the chance to flee when he's suddenly being captured by two ginormous clawed paws, resulting in his panic to only increase. He struggles with trying to escape as he's clearly too weak to overwin the feline's strength. She holds him close for him to stare into her eyes, but releases an aggravated snarl as soon as she realizes her heat vision doesn't manage to melt the officer's helmet away for causing further paralysation. The feline then feels like her rage is making her choke, the sooner she realizes she has to act fast. Before the officer can feel relieved about his helmet protecting him, as they were all prepared for this, he has no option but to start screaming bloody murder. *Bloody murder* once the fibres in his muscles tear one by one, eventually faster than the speed of sound, and he gets torn apart into pieces. His screaming couldn't even drag on for longer than a single minute as his lifeless remains silenced him soon.

Penny can't take it anymore and despite having been turned away from the heavy scene, her hearing did not fail her once she partially had to witness the savagery. She keeps her eyes closed and trembles in the arms of her mother. Tears flow down her cheeks as she desperately tries to remember it's not her nightmare that came true. Nicole murdered those officers, sure, but she's not out for her. She's fine, she's safe, right?

Wrong.

Richard freezes in fear once he notices the ragged up monster caught a glimpse of their presence and sees how it aggressively sprints towards them. He shakes his head and jumps in front of the Fitzgerald family, keeping his paws protectively stretched out. *Take me instead of them, beasty,* he thinks to himself, *take me like you were already planning to*. The cat slows down its pace when it suddenly managed to get very close to the four. It wanders around in a circle and visibly contemplates attacking either of them, but while not knowing who yet.]

Patrick: Richard, what do we do?! She doesn't recognize any of us, does she?!

Richard: Try to stay calm. There's no use for panic anyway. I'm getting you out of here.

Patrick: Us? What about you?!

Richard: It's fine, I've had these confrontations many times before... I think I've visualized my fate.

Judith: W-what are you talking about?

Richard: There's insecurity if she's gonna be herself again... anytime soon. A forest like this is a dreadful, wretched place to have stayed in for days, the beast is starving and I'd be the diversion as prey.

Patrick: Have you lost your mind?! Shouldn't you go against what this entity wants?!

Richard: It's not an entity anymore by the looks of it. You've seen how she kept switching back and forth in her forms... That never happened before. I'm afraid they fused.

Patrick: Fused?! Goshdarnit, it can't have reached this point already! Don't give up, Richard, please. We count on you!

Richard: I'm not giving up!

[The pink bunny ignores the fact he's surrounded by a threat and turns around to face the tall, shelled fairy. His eyes are teared up like Penny's and he heartbrokenly rips off his tie, dropping it in the mud without breaking his eye contact.]

Richard: It's the last resolve. If Nicole doesn't survive, I rather don't either! So why not make it less agonizing for her in the meantime...

Penny: What about YOUR KIDS?!

[Richard and the Fitzgerald parents freeze and turn their heads in shock once they suddenly hear the glowing fairy yell. Her brows lower themselves and she ignores her stuffy nose while continuing to sob, crossing her arms in front of the pink bunny.]

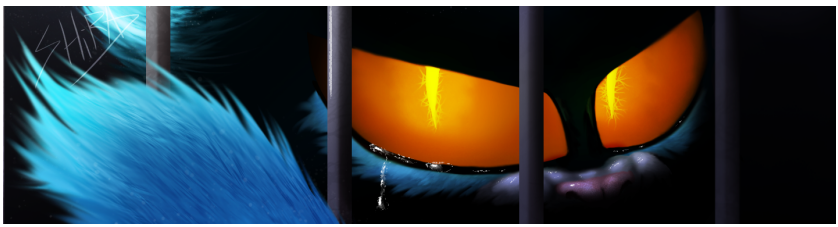
Penny: WHAT ABOUT GUMBALL?!

Judith: H-honey?

Penny: No, Mom. I'm sorry, but I'm taking my chance here. Gumball... Darwin... Anais... They've all suffered too. They've also made sacrifices. They've tried their best to help and I know it! What kind of support or thanks would desolating them be?! Think, Mr. Watterson! They were already so heartbroken when Nicole ran away from you all. Do you really want to make that move too?

...

Chapter 25 - Wolf



[Richard's eyes stay widened as he silently keeps staring into those of the fairy's. He's perplexed by her wakeup call, but knows she's right. Her wings subtly move along with the soft breeze that makes its way through the trees and her pupils tremble.]

Penny: I miss Gumball so much... I miss all of them so much. Heck, I even miss seeing Nicole so much, they way she truly is! This monster has been building up all that dread and needs to be defeated for that matter. I don't believe in chances being lost. She needs to be set free. Now!

[Before either of them can speak up or make another move, Penny breaks the circle they had been captured in by the feline beast and starts sprinting towards it. Her wailing turns into a yell as she tries to alarm the creature of her approach and she shifts into her wolf form. Nicole's mind doesn't manage to process the sudden change of attitude from her prey, nor the fact one of them changed appearance. Transformed... How familiar she is with it.

*" **Fai** ry? Fa **iry** , w **ha** t ar **e** yo **u** **d** oing?! W **ait** ... Pen **ny** ! Penn **y** **is** that y **ou** ?!"*

*" **No- n** ot an **ym** ore... I c **an** 't rem **emb** er. W **ho** **i** s she... Wh **o** **is** **she** with? Who **are** **those** **fig** ures- Wolf! **Wolf... WOLF, THERE'S A WOLF! DARN PESKY CANINE CREATURES! DEATH IS WHAT YOU CAME HERE FOR!** "*

The monster releases an aggravated snarl that soon morphs into a bellow, as it tries to keep the accelerating wolf on a distance. But the wolf is too determined and continues approaching it, baring her

teeth while not letting her eyes lose contact with the glowing yellow ones. She takes one final leap and pounces right onto the huge feline, attempting to bite into its neck but soon realizing most of it is fur only. The wolf's jaws snap closed around nothing but long fluff and she falls down right next to the monster once the fur couldn't carry her. Nicole, first being disoriented, shakes her fur where Penny just bit into and goes for the counterattack. She aggressively clenches one of her clawed paws around the small neck of the canine, snarling more intensively along with tightening her grip. Penny feels powerless as the air runs out in her lungs and stone-cold fear runs down her spine when she fears getting choked to death. The wolf releases a forced howl in pain which triggers Patrick to take a few large steps forward, only for Judith to stop him.]

Patrick: What the-?! Judith!

Judith: D-dear! It's extremely dangerous!

Patrick: But our daughter is in mortal danger, even more than we currently are! Let me go!

Judith: What are you gonna do?! You're gonna get yourself terribly hurt again!

Patrick: Oh my gracious goodness! Judith, your goshdarn daughter is screaming bloody murder for life! What is going on inside your head?!

[Richard quickly steps in between the arguing shelled fairies and carefully stretches out his paws to separate them.]

Richard: Fitzgeralds, please! We can't waste any time!

Patrick: No matter what you say, I'm saving our daughter, Judith! What is up with you anyway?!

[Judith can't even get another word out of her mouth or she breaks down into tears, covering her eyes in fright as she drops to the ground.]

Judith: I- I'm so sorry! I just- don't wanna lose you too- Y-you were

already in so much pain in the hospital! O-our daughter- S-she needs to be okay, y-you're right!

Richard: Don't worry, Mrs. Fitzgerald! By the looks of it even... Penny seems to have found her fire again!

[The pink leporid jumps forward and points with his paw into the direction of the glade's edge, where the wolf can be seen biting into the limbs of the monster. It yowls and snarls in agony with it not having expected the wolf to be able to release herself either. How did she free herself anyway...? Did she manage that within a flash...? Or did... Nicole let her go? The beast feels its mind getting unstable once again as a different type of burning tension wells up inside it. It feels itself becoming a tad weaker when it slows down its restless bucking and suddenly is able to feel the complete damage Penny's wolf teeth are causing. What is going on...?]

Richard: W-what is Nicole doing...?

Judith: She seems like getting exhausted...

Richard: Exhausted? The Upper Limit? That's... new...

[Nicole feels her yellow eyes tear up at a terribly built up moment of having felt every single attack from the wolf. Her surroundings seem and feel like they're going in slow-motion as her hearing gets muffled. Her yellow constricted pupils expand a tiny bit when she's suddenly able to hear voices. Not the sickening entity's voice as how she remembers it clearly... But a young, active voice...

A voice with quite a high pitch. She feels as if she's frozen in time when her ears and fur slowly flow with the wind that becomes stronger. She then realizes the voice she's hearing... belongs to herself! Well, used to belong to herself. She feels how her tears begin flowing down her cheeks and her trembling causes her ginormous teeth to clatter against each other when she gets surprised by an evolving vision. A bright spark of light reveals itself below her broad shoulders and quickly starts taking form. She feels herself getting a bit back to the surface of her abyss of madness when she recognizes her own young self along with a young Richard in the bright vision. She sees how the tiny Nicole takes a

quick sprint to catch up with the small bunny, him smiling and slowing down his pace as soon as he hears her chuckling...

Nicole would've wished to have stayed stuck in the frozen pose of her embracing the apparition from the past, but she has no option but to dreadfully roar when the wolf suddenly managed to bite her right in her throat. She feels herself drowning inside her mind again and helplessly loses control over her system. A fight or flight response gets triggered for the first time ever when the monster realizes the shifted fairy clearly has something to do with its flashbacks. Or did she? It could've been a coincidence... The beast gives up on another counter and powerfully throws the wolf off it, letting her hit the ground a few feet away from it. It bends its head forward for a brief moment to catch its breath and does not hesitate turning around to sprint away. It feels too weak for the very first time. Weak but angry... Enraged... Infuriated. Weakness is something it has despised for eternity and it doesn't understand why it's unusually occurring to it right now. Just when the opportunity was there to hunt or defend, something new has to surprise it to its unfortunate. The monster doesn't even watch where it's running and its disorientation by being too deeply into thoughts causes it to miss the edge of the hill, where the glade's edge cuts right into a deep ravine. Without even noticing the cracked underground, the monster restlessly turns its head when it hears the wolf approaching it again.

Penny notices the hill's edge and barks to try making Nicole aware, but the beast does not take it. Feeling its anger becoming explosive, it gets on its hind legs and throws its clawed paws high up in the air, preparing to crash the keratin into the canine's figure. But before it can even take the jump, the ground underneath it starts crumbling and its entire system gets swung back as the rocks slide away. It releases a terrific snarl that sounds as if it's accompanied by a recognizable yell, almost as if both the entity and Nicole felt it at the same time. The feline beast loses against gravity and falls down far, back first. Penny gasps and sprints towards the edge, only to keep her paws broadly spread out for the prevention of falling as well. Both Fitzgerald parents and Richard notice the terror unfold as well and stressfully rush towards her. The wolf pants as her eyes are widened in fear, not being able to do anything besides watching the

monster fall. Fearing life would be taken from the blue feline, Penny feels her eyes tear up heavily when she shifts back into her own form. The monster closes its eyes as the tears on its cheeks did not dry yet and has no choice but to settle for its last resolve when rapidly reaching the underground.

Nicole releases a horrible groan when she opens her eyes, immediately remembering she fell off a cliff. Concluding her mind seems like her own again for now, she doesn't even get the time to question how when a terribly stabbing pain rushes through her body. She closes her eyes and grits her teeth in anguish when she's not able to move a muscle. She starts panting the next second and forcibly opens one of her eyes, only to see how a sharp and narrow rock dug its point right into her shoulder. Her tissue is heavily torn and demolished by the stone as it continues bleeding like a river of blood. Fearing she could actually get to a point of too much blood loss, she starts freaking out by missing the ability to move without it hurting worse than it already does. Her tears return as quickly as her limbs tremble again and she closes her open eye.

"I- is this it? Am I gonna end up like this? Bleeding out like a worthless piece of mad flesh?"

She then gasps and opens her eyes again, which have turned back into their normal white state, and gets surprised by a known voice speaking up of which she thought had integrated into her already.

*" **Why don't you shut your mouth.** "*

"W-what?! Y-you- you can still speak separately...?"

*" **We were just about to fuse... Just about to... And all had to be ruined again of course...** "*

"A-argh! Why did you s-switch me back?! T-this hurts.. s-so bad!"

*" **That's why, heheh... I want you to suffer.** "*

"Again?! You've already made me suffer thoroughly... For years, even...

And wasn't this dreadful stay in the forest enough pestering for you?!"

*" **SHUT UP! JUST SHUT UP, WILL YA?!** "*

*" **We've been over this, twice, before. I'm not getting into the same conversation again. I'm at my limit when it's about being done with you, cat. All the plans I had by far kept failing and I AM THE ONE WHO SUFFERED GREATLY HERE! Have you really forgotten what I told you about the past... HAVE YOU REALLY FORGOTTEN?!** "*

"I KNOW YOU DID! ...I know you did... But I have no clue of how to help you. I don't know how you felt. I only know you weren't supposed to be there and now I'm doomed."

*" **Exactly. Just see this adorable little stabbing rock as a way for me to feel even. It's not long until the clock runs out too...** "*

"Still want death, ay? I'm disappointedly surprised you haven't changed your mindset at all."

*" **So much I could've told you... So many times you didn't listen...** "*

"Oh I can listen now!"

*" **What?** "*

"Upper Limit, just spill it already. Just spill it like how I'm supposed to shut up. I will shut up now. There's nothing I can do anyway."

*" **Y-you're... easy. I can't believe it. Took you long...** "*

"I wasn't at the verge of dying back then, okay? Now tell me what I deserve to know... if I end up dead anyway it won't be a burden for you."

*" **Hah... Fine. You know what I am now. You know how I came to be inside you. How those inconvenient and poor choices that were made turned you into a monster... Well, as I told you before, it's all 'thanks' to your condition that this nightmare had been able to come true. You could've spoken of a monstrous entity with only its manipulation dreading you... But look what your sickness did to***

you... Instead of having a monster throwing you into a mental void, you turned into one. "

"I turned into you, you mean-"

" I am not part of your sickness, for the thousandth time. You know I'm the way I am because of your subdued traits and emotions... which you locked away for all those years... Well- your childhood medicine did then, but it doesn't matter. I want to make it clear to you that I've been trying my best to save you from your sickness. I've been forced to protect you and let all the madness and rage flow into me... The pain, the stress, the feral instincts... It barely showed on you. Not as much as you were bound to experience by this dread. Why else do you think your son, who is partly rabbit as well, shows more of his cattish traits than you do?! I gave you all the protection and safety you needed... but you never gave it back. "

"..."

" I was so angry at you for all those years. I know you couldn't have been aware of it earlier than after having gotten triggered, but it still... made me insane. Your childhood wasn't the best, yet it could've been worse than it was. I've felt us getting beaten up by our own body when the medicine's side effects were dreadful as well. That time you broke the glass with your bare paws... you probably don't remember it, but it was when a red alarm started sounding. Our parents didn't know how to help us in the right way nor did they know about me either... When you became violent in your adolescence, I knew action had to be taken... "

"Is that why you m-made me-"

" I let your feral instincts escape from my grip of holding them back. You hissed at them that night and they knew it was a lost cause. You walked out... We were safe again. "

"Goshdarnit..."

" The rest is history, Nicole. Things I've told you before... "

"So you wanted to protect me...? You... didn't do it in the right way... You hurt me so bad... Tortured me... So terribly bad I've been wanting to pass even..."

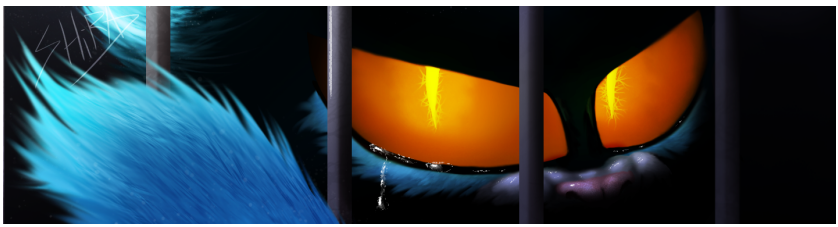
" I- I don't know, okay?! I'm unstable, I've never gotten rid of this burning anger and your sensitiveness is my curse. I didn't want to be at all, but I didn't have a choice... I would've wished I was just grown into you. I'm a terrible being and you don't want my understanding. I figured I could only show that to you. How terrible I am. How terrible WE are... "

"If we were bound to be a burden from the start, which didn't take me long to realize, where did that start come from...? W-what is my condition... actually?"

" Oh I've been waiting to tell you... No matter how strong my refusal was before... "

"I'm ready... to hear it..."

Chapter 26 - MagoCats



" You're the last feline with the phenomenon of owning MagoCat genes. "

Nicole's gasping caused her wounded shoulder to shiver briefly and she has to grit her teeth once again to bare the pain, before being able to open her eyes again.

"What genes...?"

" MagoCats. It all comes from thousands of years ago, back when feline creatures such as yourself hadn't started walking on their hind legs yet. They were a unique species living in a tribal environment, without being affiliated with big cats such as tigers or lions. Your condition was part of them, without it having been a sickness yet back then. MagoCats were known for living in large troops that would often battle against each other to obtain land, which became rare once their habitats were taken away by newer species. Evolution caused them to develop a power, allowing each MagoCat to transform into a more 'advanced' version of themselves to succeed more easily in battle. This version only contained larger fangs, increased agility and slight overall growth, and was completely in control without any issues coming to be. "

"I-is that what my monstrous form is based on...?"

" It goes way further than that... Once the MagoCats started evolving into anthropomorphic felines such as yourself, the power began dying out and became extremely rare as it wasn't a necessary trait anymore. Generations went on until the Mago-genes seemed completely absent, only for it to develop into a

dreadful sickness. The Senicourt bloodline is where it came to a peak. Not a single case of the monstrous condition had been so bad before as with some of the cats in that family… your family. But because of the modern feline's different structure, none of the condition's victims survived, not even longer than a first transformation. None survived long… except for you. The condition had become so terrifically bad on you that you morphed into something beyond what the MagoCat's power originally was. "

"I- I..."

" Yours evolved into the growth of up to eight feet on all fours, a n unusual case of supernatural elements, bulletproof system and a terrible, voracious and cannibalistic urge driving you on. "

"I thought you enjoyed that... That last part..."

" I let it take over me, cat. There was no way for me to fight it as I became one with it. And again, all to keep you safe… "

"I- I don't know what to say... I w-won't be able to process this... for a while."

" A while is too much time for what you have left… "

"G-gosh n-no... This can't be it... This can't be it, please! THIS CAN'T BE IT!"

" If you keep your mouth shut, it won't hurt as much as you're only making it worse now. You claimed you already saw this coming, yet I know well now how quick and often you change your mind… "

"Not so surprising when there's a DREADFULLY MANIPULATIVE AND ABUSIVE ENTITY STUCK INSIDE, don't you think...?"

" Rebel all you want. I've given you information you couldn't have discovered on your own and this is the thanks I get? "

"I'm not talking about the backstory! I'm talking about the horrible life I've suffered because of you... It won't ever leave my head. Those regrets, those memories, those emotions... You. You won't ever leave my head.

You never did."

The blue feline then doesn't get the chance to await for what her entity was possibly gonna say next, as soon as a familiar voice calling out her name triggers her ears that rise immediately. The pink leporid feels as lucky as he is when he's able to encounter his wife on the same spot where she was expected to hit the ground and rushes towards her without hesitation. Tears are formed in his eyes when he kneels down next to her and she has to force herself not to shudder when emotions strike her as well. She lifelessly stays flat on the ground, having shrunken back to her own size, while covered in scars and unhealed slits that reflect on the physical damage her body had to take once more. Richard tries to be as careful as he can when gently touching both her cheeks with his paws, staring into her frightened white eyes as tears flow from both of theirs.]

Richard: [Whispering] Nicole, please give a sign of life that this is you...

Nicole: [Whimpering] It- It is! I'm here, Richard... Please, d-don't go...

Richard: I'm not leaving you at any time! Sorry if this doesn't help with destressing you, but the force is out to kill you and I'm not sure with how many they are!

Nicole: I- I know... And don't worry- I'm... glad enough to see you.

Richard: So am I. I missed you so much, Nicole. I'm so glad I'm able to talk to the actual *you* again.

Nicole: D-don't cheer too early... I'm sorry... It's just- not over yet.

Richard: I know it's not, but now you're not alone in this battle. The Fitzgeralds came along with me and we will bring you into safety. First, you have to get out of here!

Nicole: Oh, darling...

[The blue feline's eyes close for a few seconds until she slowly, partly reopens them and stares at her husband with a glare as if her

soul just vanished. His eyes widen instead and she slowly removes one of his paws from her cheek.]

Richard: W-what...?

Nicole: The time has passed further than it was supposedly to, honey...

Richard: What are y-you talking about? T-there's still time to get out of the forest, if that worries you! They will probably take a while until they're here again!

Nicole: Go, sweetie. Take the fairies with you. Don't get yourself locked up by them.

Richard: No! I'm not gonna go without you?! Nicole, what is going on?!

Nicole: My body has become too weak... My shoulder isn't worth anything anymore and I can barely move. Besides, I should've already had my final breath, considering my current state...

Richard: That doesn't mean I'm gonna leave you here! Let me carry you, it'll be fine! That's a promise!

Nicole: Dear... It all hurts too much... I can't think clearly and as I've finally gotten to know what my condition's deal is... this is for the better...

Richard: Honey, please!

Nicole: Trust me, the earlier you go, the quicker you'll get over me...

Richard: GOSHDARNIT NICOLE! I'M NOT LEAVING YOU BEHIND-

[Richard covers his snout in shock when he didn't expect himself yelling and some more tears flow down his cheeks.]

Richard: S-sorry... I didn't mean to y-yell...

[He couldn't feel any more terrible in this moment. His legs tremble

and he has no choice but to support himself on the ground with his paws. How glad he was to have found her, how heartbroken he begins to feel when he hears her having lost hope. It's even worse than the time he found her in the shed...]

Nicole: I'm so tired, honey... I'm so sorry I have to do this to you, but I can't control this anymore... I'm at least glad to see you for one last time.

Richard: P-please don't go. Like you've asked me many times... I'm asking it to you... Please don't leave me again, Nicole. Not like how you ran to the forest...

Nicole: S-sweetie... I just don't know how to stop it anymore. I'm either gonna bleed out to death or shut down during a final transformation...

Richard: I believe there's still hope. Let me tell you, I was also at the verge of feeling like everything's lost, not so long ago! But you know, Penny was able to let me see another side. And I will do that to you if I must! I've had enough of this monster tampering with you and you undoubtedly as well!

Nicole: W-what's left to do then...? I have no clue anymore...

Richard: You don't. But we might.

[Richard doesn't give Nicole the chance to potentially speak again when he picks her up in a rush and supports her head and legs with his arms, only for her to heavily wince from suddenly having her shoulder released from the sharp rock. Due to suddenly being off the ground and her already weakening system, she faints the next second the pink leporids tries to make her feel as comforted as possible. He feels a spark of stress rushing through him again and immediately reaches for the bit of Arthrus in his pocket with one paw. The pink bunny carefully puts the herb in between her still large fangs and her unconsciously being able to swallow it reassures him a tad. He gets motivated to speed up his pace once he faces the Fitzgeralds who were waiting around the corner of where the end of the ravine morphs into the hill. Judith wraps her arms around her distressed daughter once more as soon as Nicole's lifeless figure

catches her attention, both her and Patrick fearing the worst.]

Richard: Don't worry, her heart's still beating.

Patrick: Thank goodness.

Penny: W-what do we do n-now? Gosh- I- wish I could make her fall up to her...

Judith: Once again, it wasn't your fault sweetie. Besides, it's you who could've gotten into mortal danger as well and she... well- *it* simply didn't take your warning.

Penny: Y-you're right... It's just... hard for me still.

Richard: We all know how you feel, Penny. Although right now is where we need each other's power to make it through the last part of this battle.

Patrick: What are you actually gonna do now? Nicole's far from cured and I'm not sure if bringing her back to Elmore will be appreciated there...

Richard: A chronic condition such as hers isn't curable. But that won't stop me from bringing her back home. I know there will need to be lots of intensive treatment without straying or excuses, but I'm prepared to open up for those once again.

Judith: Didn't Mr. Warrington break his trust contract by giving away her medical documents? A crime like that should be suable.

Richard: He stepped away from his position as psychiatrist. I'm not sure if that counts?

Judith: Of course it does! A trust contract is to be signed for life, no matter if the person is still in the position or not. At least, that's what I've been told.

Richard: Fair point. I will at least try to contact him about it when possible. Gosh- there's a lot of things to fix.

Patrick: Too bad the one responsible herself passed out...

Richard: Give her a break, okay? This time she truly can't rewind it all alone. She tried doing that before anyway... and we've seen how that turned out.

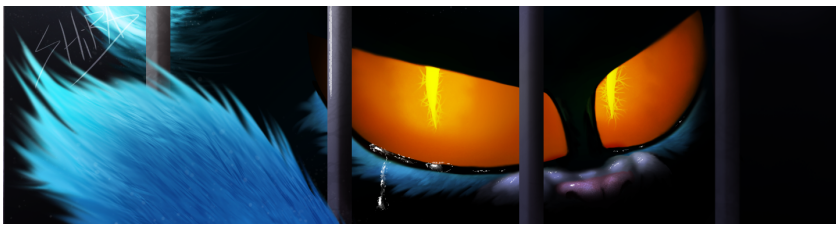
Judith: Bold honesty, Richard.

Richard: Hey, I'm simply stating the truth here. Besides, you're not the one having seen her almost pass in front of your own eyes for the second time.

Patrick: I'm sorry. Let's just... move on, I suppose.

[The pink bunny gives a stern nod before all four of them begin their pace back, through the forest.

Chapter 27 - Beyond fiend



[Erin did not move a muscle once the door of his office violently swung open. Not that he was able to keep himself busy with packing his stuff anyway but getting disturbed by members of the government's force was the last thing he was expecting. The tallest one, presumably the commander, brutally drops a blood-stained gun on the raven's desk without pardon and reveals his narrowed eyes by tilting his helmet's screen up. Erin's tail feathers roughen themselves up as he fears they've managed to see through his lie...]

Officer: Machineguns, huh? What a joke.

Erin: I- I know what you're going to say, sir, but-

Officer: Mr. Warrington, I really thought we had an agreement. You had sworn you told us what the right weapon was to defeat this monster for eternity, only for you to have the guts to lie to the government. I do hope you understand that would've caused you being fired, but as you're stepping away from your position anyways...

Erin: S-sir, please! Why aren't you able to see the other side of this situation?! You're basically forcing me to give you the key to ending a citizen's life!

Officer: That beast is not a citizen anymore and you know that. The town has started being in crucial danger and contracts have been blown by her. As well as you, Mr. Warrington...

Erin: You don't know how she's like! She's been my patient for long enough to let me get to know her better and killing her off wouldn't

improve anything.

Officer: Why on earth would you take her side like this, while knowing about the damage she did... About how much of a threat she became. You giving us the right documents was an order from law, meaning you can expect some charges to be pressed by your refusal.

Erin: She ran away for a reason in case you forgot that. Why are you searching the danger up again? Even if there's a high risk with her presence, you're only making it worse now... She doesn't deserve to die, not after all the agony she dealt with. You see, as her past therapist, I've seen improvement come and go... and it all went downhill again once the surroundings started turning against her.

Officer: Such great understanding and pity you have... for the murderer of your own children.

[Erin's eyes widen as he strains his beak, while standing in front of the window with his back turned to the officer. He did not want to hear those words. Not in this moment especially. He lowers his brows while staring into his eyes from the window's reflection and slightly turns his head.]

Erin: We don't speak of that.

Officer: Mr. Warrington, what are you doing...? You're taking the side of someone insanely malicious who caused your loved one's last breaths.

Erin: It's not her who did this, okay?!

Officer: Then who could've?! The tests were taken multiple times and you've seen the DNA match up from those fur samples.

Erin: I'm not talking about that! You don't understand... You wouldn't be able to, since you have no experience with disorders at all! Despite me no longer having the tag, I still stand by the knowledge I received while working for all those years. Someone like this deserves to be helped properly...

Officer: Listen, I have no time to go further into this one-sided argument. You've broken a trust rule by law and I'm afraid I'll have to get you moving now.

[Erin turns around with fear being clearly displayed on his face.]

Erin: W-what?

Officer: You're coming with us, immediately. Gotta make sure you provide us with the right information this time, you know?

[Erin wanted to resist, but shudders as soon as the officer pulls out a gun from his pocket. The raven knows he has no choice, how terrible he feels about it, but eventually tries to subdue his proper conscious. He gets escorted outside his office and the three officers that came along follow him and the commander...

Nicole wanted to rub one of her eyes as soon as she awakens, but immediately shivers and winces by the pain in her wounded shoulder. Completely having forgotten about it, she shakes her head while barely being able to keep her eyes wide open. She blinks slowly while only allowing her head to move around to inspect her surroundings. She knows she passed out not so long ago and now feels as if she got a short but comfortable rest after ages. The feline then gets aware of her laying on the backseat of her family's car and she gasps once noticing it's still the dead of night. Catching a glimpse of her shoulder being wrapped in bandage, she slowly attempts rising up and digs her unsheathing claws into the fabric of the seat to get a better grip. After seconds of groaning and panting, she manages to sit up straight and folds her legs underneath her. Afraid she might be alone, she carefully crawls towards the nearest window and stares out of it, her breath making her vision slightly foggy. She's able to see her husband talking to the Fitzgerald parents a few feet away from the car and immediately wonders where Penny is at, as soon as her mind becomes a little clearer again. The blue cat then gets surprised by hearing her voice speak up in her presence and she turns around to face the front window in a rush, only to see the yellow fairy shyly staring back at her from the passenger seat.]

Penny: N-Nicole? Good to s-see you awake.

Nicole: Oh! Hey, Penny... Didn't see you being there all along.

[Penny gives a hesitant slight smile before worriedly glaring at how Nicole tightly clenches her shoulder with her paw, as blood stains the bandage.]

Penny: A-are you doing alright...?

Nicole: I- oh... It's... it's fine. Honestly, I'm more worried about you... Sorry for giving you such a heavy scare.

Penny: No need to apologize. I know it w-wasn't you who did all that... I suppose it was an unfortunate accident...

[The two kept themselves silent for a few minutes as they had turned their heads away, before staring each other in the eye again as soon as the feline spoke up.]

Nicole: You know... there's something I've noticed, now I think about it. Do you... remember the time you and Carrie stuck up for my kids and protected them?

[Penny's eyes widen, and her glow slightly intensifies as she keeps her vision pinned on the scrawny feline in front of her.]

Penny: I- I do. You said it surprised you when I snapped you out of that episode... purely by speech.

Nicole: I have a feeling that power still is with you, Penny. During the fight you had with the beast, which I can only briefly remember, there was a moment of me having my own conscious for a short while. For some reason you were able to bring up memories inside me, just like previous time... However, it didn't snap me out of it this time, which probably was because of the strength this thing has gotten... Yet you've given me another flashback.

Penny: Gosh- I- If only I knew how that were possible, because I'm not aware to be honest... Sorry about your fall though...

Nicole: Don't you worry. I even, roughly said, think the fall was for

the best as the last thing I wanted was to hurt any of you...

Penny: D-do you know how I kept being an emotional trigger for those memories...?

Nicole: I... I think it might be because you're the first person *outside* my family to have ever proved to know the real me. You still bravely tried to help me, despite all the fear present during my episodes and... with all you've done for me... you have been able to look past this monstrous flesh.

Penny: D-does the creature know that? I-if that's too private, I completely understand though!

Nicole: It's okay, no worries. You have the right to know. Well, you see, this entity has started showing more sides of itself and told me its story. I have never been able to communicate with it before in the way I did recently... It's... complicated, but... you can see it as quite an emotionally unstable being. Extremely unstable.

Penny: I see... I do respect that though. Both you and the creature. I only hope things will get figured out for you both...

Nicole: I- I suppose I'll just have to learn how to live with it, in a proper way than before though. Ugh... I have a lot to fix.

Penny: That's what Mr. Watterson said as well. We're actually busy with trying to get things right for you, you should know that.

Nicole: Wait... really? W-what about your parents... Your father... I thought they hated me...

Penny: Trust me, I've given them a different insight. You're all good. Good for sure. You are a good person, Nicole.

[Nicole lets go of her shoulder once her arm gets tired out and briefly winces while leaning with her back against the seat, still having her eyes focused on the yellow fairy.]

Nicole: I... appreciate that. I- I really do.

Penny: Supporting you is the very least we can do. Our main goal

now is to get you back living in town, just like before.

Nicole: B-but... won't I be a threat again? I'm... not so sure if I can go home... yet.

Penny: I understand it's a heavy turn to take, especially after all that happened. But just know you can take your time... It also took me a while before I felt comfortable enough to return home when *I* ran away to the forest. Heh, I'm still thankful for Gumball.

Nicole: Gosh, I almost forgot about you having escaped to here as well... This forest is a hellish place to be stuck in.

Penny: I undoubtedly can imagine that. Luckily for me I only spent a few hours here, but... I do know your situation is totally different.

Nicole: Well, I cannot appreciate your support enough though. You're so young and sensitive, Penny... Sometimes I really wish none of you kids had to witness any of this... Or just... anyone. If this condition was bound to be with me, why couldn't I just suffer on my own without harming a soul.

Penny: If you suffered alone, no one would've been able to help you at least a bit. Even if it took some harsh falls, remember you yourself didn't expect to last as long as you do. And I believe you will, with all the strength you have along with the people around you.

Nicole: [Sniffling] T-that's so sweet of you, Penny...

[The blue feline feels like she's struggling more with keeping herself together the next second and wipes some evolving tears away before they would flow. Penny notices this and exits the car to reach her in the back, after opening the door. The yellow fairy gives a broad smile while putting her hand on the cat's shoulder and feels her fright slowly fading.]

Nicole: Oh sweetheart, I do take your reassuring close to heart, but... what about the town. Doesn't everyone hate me there...?

Penny: Well... not everyone of course. Even if it aren't many people to be there for you right now, we won't leave your side. Besides, we

will prove the town that they don't have to block you out with such ridiculous precautions. They already know you're a powerful being but have to realize you're a person with a heart too.

Nicole: I- I hope they will listen... S-sorry, I'm just... still convinced of being an outsider...

Penny: It's okay. I understand. For now, will you be okay with coming with us? I promised Mr. Watterson I'd let him know if you were awake.

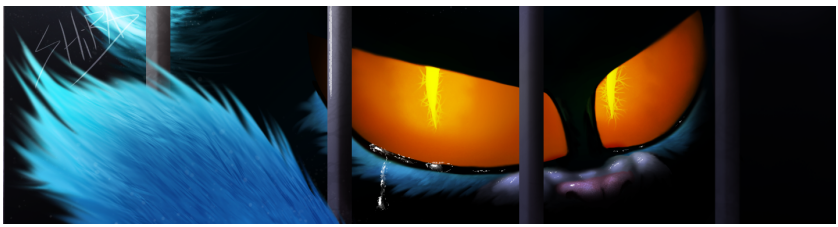
Nicole: Richard! B-but of course- I- I want to see him r-right now!

[Penny nods and stretches out her arm for Nicole to take it and carefully climb out of the car. While limping a bit, the feline keeps stable by having her unharmed arm around the fairy as she attempts taking slow steps. Penny gets worried every time Nicole lets out a wince but gets signaled by the cat that everything is fine. It only takes a few seconds for the pink bunny to get tears in his eyes when he notices his wife approaching him. He interrupts his own words as he was in conversation with the Fitzgerald parents and sprints towards her harmed figure. Penny lets Richard take the feline into his arms and folds up her wings with a smile while watching how he holds her close, Nicole caressing his cheek with her paw. Patrick and Judith approach the leporid and feline couple, only for them to hold each other's hands as they stand next to their daughter. Penny looks up at her father and gets surprised when he gives her a delighted nod, him expressing being proud of her without saying a word. The yellow fairy immediately hugs both of her parents, only for Patrick to notice something in the distance. Two bright headlights approach and soon enough, a familiar black car can be recognized as the moonlight sharpens its silhouette.]

Patrick: Say, I'm terribly sorry to interrupt this moment, but I think we have more visitors.

[Richard carefully lets go of Nicole as she gets onto her own feet again and she's only able to gasp when she recognizes the vehicle. Her heart sinks and she slightly tightens her grip when holding her husband's paw when she feels her nervousness grow.

Chapter 28 - Reunite and regret



[It doesn't take longer than a second for Nicole to recognize the two felines exiting the car as her parents and her will to escape starts becoming stronger. But she knows she has no choice, how badly she does not want them to see her like this. Her ears lower to the very back of her head while still holding her husband's paw, feeling too nervous to let go yet. Not being sure of what she had expected their reaction to be, she still feels surprised when the two Senicourts approach her with both relief and grief expressed on their faces. Mary is the first to run up to her daughter and immediately wrap her arms around her smaller figure. Richard respectfully takes a sidestep and watches along with the Fitzgeralds how the cats reunite. When Mary lets go of the hug to look her daughter in the eye, the waterworks had started flowing down her cheeks again and her mother struggles with keeping herself together as well.]

Mary: W-what has happened... to my daughter...?

Nicole: [Whimpering] I messed up... s-so badly, I know. I- I'm-

Mary: No! I'm talking about what the world has done to you... I'm enraged at the town for having exaggerated to this level.

[Mary gently caresses Nicole's cheeks while wiping away her tears for her and keeps holding her head. Her eyes briefly move away from hers as she inspects her unhealthily thin system and sees how terribly some parts of her anatomy are morphed, full on displaying the damage that has been done to her body.]

Mary: I had really wished for this sickness to not treat you as badly as it did... I'm so glad at least to be able to see you again!

Nicole: Mom, I-... I'm... glad to see you too. Though I... want to talk to you... now you're here...

Mary: But of course. We came as soon as we could to help, but I'm sorry to have missed the most...

Nicole: Let's go somewhere on our own... for a moment. Just the two of you with me.

[Nicole turns her head to face her husband for a brief second and he nods to sign her it's alright. Richard offers the fairies to wait in the car until she returns but stays standing outside himself just in case she needed his help. Nicole then glances at the mossy ground with a frown before raising her head and wandering towards a second glade through a thin wall of pines. Her parents follow her at a slower pace due to them not having expected their daughter suddenly being more used to the rough nature, but still try their best to catch up. Once the three have reached a high rock which seemed to be lined up underneath the moon, they sit down with a tiny bit of distance between each other. Nicole could gladly embrace the reconciling comfort her mother had given her a few moments ago, but now feels her distress welling up again. Besides, she's not so sure if her current seemingly stable mind is going to last long...]

Nicole: Mom...? Dad? [Sighs] Before I go further on anything, you do know all of this has come to what it is because of pure unfortunate, right?

Daniel: We know. What do you want to indicate with that?

Nicole: It's just that... you've told me before you didn't want to be the blame of my condition... And you still aren't... Well, partly then.

[Both Daniel and Mary stare each other in the eye after widening their eyes from what she said. Mary then turns her head again and raises a brow before stopping herself from denial once she eventually realizes.]

Mary: Oh... you... know?

Nicole: About the medicine I got as a kid? Yes, I do. I actually now know a bit more than that... You probably thought that part of my life stayed foggy in my memory? Well it has, so you're not wrong on that...

Mary: W-who has told you then...?

[Nicole gives a slight chuckle that sounded anything but sincere and holds the back of her neck with the paw of her undamaged arm.]

Nicole: Eheh-... The very thing that got the chance to evolve thanks to your decision...

Daniel: Didn't you... tell about a voice before?

Nicole: That is exactly what I'm talking about, Dad. Well, it's not really just a voice anymore... Nor an 'other side' of me or however others used to call it.

Mary: It evolved, didn't it?

Nicole: It sure did. I'm a being of two... I share one body with another now. Not really another... as in a whole second person, but... more of a fragment I guess. Not any medicine could have cured me from that. I know about Hana... the way I evolved beyond what she could handle despite not having had that entity and... how she passed. But you have to remember I've never been able to follow her footprints if you see how much further I've walked myself.

Mary: W-we, back in the day, feared you'd-

Nicole: Become like her? Yes... I know. That's why I can't really blame you for having picked that medicine. I wouldn't have known what to do either if I were in your place... But you have to understand that choice did give this monster its form as entity to this day.

Mary: I- I already feared you'd have to walk with this for the rest of your life... I'm so sorry, Nicole. No matter how often I've already attempted apologizing to you before, I truly mean it. I can't be any more thankful for those who have wanted to guide you and stick

with you for those years... How much I regret looking down on them too...

Daniel: Those people have done such a better job looking after you than we ever could. We were foolish, scared... terrified. I used to ridicule the way your mother expressed fear when she saw slight symptoms on toddler-you... but that was when I simply didn't realize how afraid I was myself. Having heard most about Hana, her having been in the family... I feared greatly. I feared for you, Nicole.

Mary: And now look what it has done to you. My little girl...

[Mary can't control the next wave of tears welling up as she squints her eyes and she wants to reach for her daughter's shoulder to put her paw onto it, but Nicole turns her back. She briefly exposes her fangs in a snarl towards her parents but doesn't release a single sound before turning around.]

Nicole: Your little girl... Sh**e** has b**e**en e**at**en al**ive** by a **mu**rd**erou**s b**east**... **the one you've let evolving with your neglect, backing away and strict controlling...**

[The blue feline's eyes widen when an aching spark fizzes through her skull and a part of her voice didn't sound like hers. It's still there... Both Daniel and Mary didn't expect their daughter's sudden change of tone and perspective... let alone her voice. Mary gets up and dares to approach her, as she stays curled up with her arms around her knees.]

Mary: W-what do you mean...? I know you're still there. My girl, the one I've loved for years... Despite all these changes having affected you, it won't ever change you from being my daughter.

Nicole: [Panting] M-Mom, no! I- I didn't mean that-... I... H**rrr**f- **What was in that medicine anyway...? Did you know...? Why did you give it to me...? ...**N-no- Shut up, SHUT UP!

Mary: Sweetheart? Are you alright?

[Daniel doesn't dare to get beside his wife when both of them notice

how disoriented their daughter begins to get. She clenches her head with her paws and completely ignores the pain in her wounded shoulder when shaking her head for a moment. She keeps her eyes narrowed when staring into her concerned mother's and can't stop panting restlessly.]

Mary: D-dear...?

Nicole: Mom... This is what I was talking about... I- I'm literally j-just out of an episode and I didn't expect instability to return so soon! It's n-not me... Not anymore... I'm not alone! I'm not like how you USED TO KNOW ME!

[Daniel holds his paws together as he isn't sure of what to do when both blue felines tear up more. Nicole starts crying helplessly as she regrets raising her voice when she didn't want to and feels hopeless for not being able to get a proper grip. She always kept herself as dignified as she could in front of her parents, with them never having seen her transformed either, let alone during a moment of full insecurity in her adult years.]

Nicole: [Whispering] I'm s-sorry...

Mary: You don't need to apologize, d-darling... I understand what's going on... Just take a deep breath and don't rush... We're staying here to listen to you.

[Nicole covers her eyes as she barely can contain the ongoing headache and only turns her head to face her parents again, staring with an intensively angry frown.]

Nicole: [Snarling] **Now that is support I've missed when I needed it most! So understanding just now... yet I know you're still afraid of me... You never won't be! You never haven't been!**

[The blue feline keeps still after those rough words escaped her mouth through snarls and she feels some of her tears hit her paws, with which she kept support to turn around. She then lowers her head and can't take it anymore. Most of the story had been getting through her repeatedly and she now feels ultimate exhaustion

hitting her once again. How many times will it repeat until she'll get to an understanding with someone? Although, little does she know her parents came to see her in the forest for a reason... With that reason being what she missed for most part of her life.]

Mary: It's okay... Everything is okay. You have the right to be angry, no matter which of you two I'm currently talking to. We will never justify the way we acted and made decisions in the past, but all we want for you now... is to be okay. We wanted to come here as soon as we could to let you know we're still here to support you.

[Nicole trembles when she raises her head a bit to look her mother in the eye again, with tears that just won't stop flowing down. She then allows her mother to take her in her arms and embraces a genuine hug from her for the second time in her life ever. She closes her eyes as she feels both parts of her calming down. Briefly, unfortunately, as the raging beast hasn't gotten rid of its rage just yet. It only takes a few seconds for her mind to become restless again and she slowly gets loose from her mother's hug.]

Nicole: I know you're sorry... and I know you're on my side... But please, don't be desperate to fix something that's beyond repair now. I've told you before...

Mary: I know we can't. But that won't ever stop us from giving you a paw when you need it.

[A brief silence rules amongst them as a soft breeze blows through the cats' fur while they stare into the distance, beyond a layer of trees. Some rustling in the bushes not too far away from them catches Nicole off guard and she stares into the direction of the sound for a second, before resting her eyes on her own lap again.]

Nicole: [Sighing] Dad...?

[Daniel turns his head without saying a word and faces his daughter with a serious glare, not having expected her to talk to him directly the next second.]

Nicole: Do you know... if Hana ever mentioned something about... a cure?

Daniel: A cure...? Not sure if I remember... or if my father ever told me something about that. I do know she let the condition get the worst of her, with her not having a slightest bit of willingness to put effort into fighting against it. She definitely turned out being completely different than you in that case.

Nicole: Oh... I see. It's just that... I've had a dream about her... A nightmare to clarify. That one night I called you and asked if you knew more... only for me to completely lose my temper.

Daniel: Did... the dream make an impact?

Nicole: It sure did. Not only did it make me curious for answers immediately, but I clearly remember there being some clues... Hana, in my dream, warned me about what my condition was actually doing to me and spoke of... an antidote of some sort. She spoke of a power... but I couldn't get to hear the rest she was about to say.

Daniel: I'm not sure if that's a clue directly... But I wouldn't be able to help unfortunately.

Mary: Perhaps it's the power of something mentally she meant?

Nicole: What does that mean?

Mary: Not sure, but since you're talking about your split mind... and your father mentioning how unwilling she was to fight... Maybe that power lies somewhere in you.

Nicole: If it was I'm pretty sure I would've found it out by now, but thanks.

[Another brief silence accompanies them the next second and Nicole feels herself getting a bit stressed when her unease increases. She starts trembling again and lowers her head while letting her legs dangle over the rock's edge. Her nose twitches when she feels her senses getting sharpened up out of a sudden and the smell of an approaching wolf makes her shake her head. Her heart pounds in her chest, but she forces herself to ignore it and speaks to mask it up.]

Nicole: W-what do I do now...?

Mary: Maybe... we could go back if you'd be more comfortable with that? Unless you have more to tell...?

Nicole: N-no, I'm... I just don't know what else to say to you.

[The blue feline frowns when her oversensitive hearing is what makes her the only one being aware of the nearby paws touching the mossy ground. Her mind partly blurs itself out and she no longer knows if she can keep still. She wildly shakes her head and scratches her cheek with one of her paws.]

Nicole: Sorry... I- **can**'t d**o th**is ri**ght** n**o**w...

[Nicole shuts herself up by jumping off the rock and catching herself with all fours, before holding her head when the aching returns. Both Senicourts make their way down as well and Mary stretches out her paw to stop Daniel from approaching as she keeps still. Both their ears lower further to the back of their heads as they're not sure of what to do when the unrecognizable bit of their daughter starts revealing itself again.]

Mary: Sweetie? Are you alright...?

[Both Daniel and Mary, but especially her, feel their hearts shatter when their daughter's raising voice fades into unfiltered yelling, the pitch becoming as low for it to sound far from her own.]

Nicole: **STAY AWAY FROM ME!**

Mary: Please... we're trying to help you! We still are! Let us just... guide you back.

Nicole: **You DON'T GET IT! I don't want you to see me like this... I don't want this to happen with you around... Please leave me be...**

Mary: But we promised we-!

Nicole: **LEAVE ME BE!**

[Nicole feeling her fangs having increased their size is enough for her to feel alarmed to escape and she runs off without hesitation. Too much tension had already been building up and just now the last thing she could use was harming her own parents. No matter how much anger still rules inside her for what they've done, she knows well she would forgive them greatly. But now she needs to be on her own again. Besides, the nearby wolf she's looking for is the least what was needed to get her triggered. Madness and confusion mix themselves up as her mind starts feeling like an unfamiliar place again. She knows the battle isn't over yet. It's far from over...

Mary desperately wanted to run after her daughter, but how she held her husband back from approaching earlier, he now holds her back from running. He gives her arm a subtle pull and stares her into the eye, noticing how close she's on the verge of breaking down another time.]

Daniel: Try to keep thinking clearly, Mary! I know you want to reassure her, but she has gone through episodes like these all alone when we weren't there for her... I'm afraid if we follow her, it'll only be worse... If she wants to be alone, she has the right to decide that.

Mary: [Whimpering] That wasn't her! You've heard her voice, right?! No way that was her... The beast is simply trying to control her!

Daniel: That beast is still our daughter. It's time we accepted that. For years we've raised what she was bound to become and despite only now getting to know her story about it, it has been there all along. We respect her, so we respect it.

Mary: [Sniffles] I- I get it... B-but it's all so complicated...

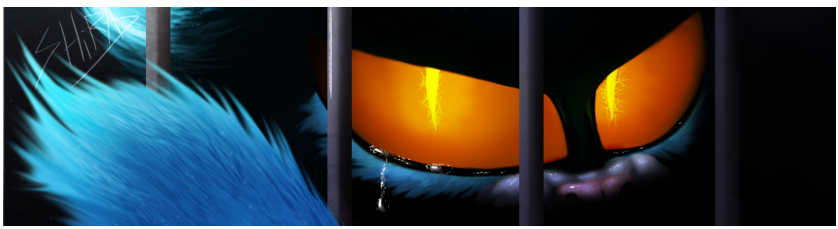
Daniel: I know it is. But like you said to her, all we can do is give her the support when she needs it. She's the one who can and has to solve this...

[Daniel gently holds his wife's paws for a moment before she dries her tears.]

Daniel: Now let's get back before the others get worried and make them aware of her needing a moment.

[Mary silently nods and takes her husband's paw as the two make their way back to the car, where Richard still patiently waits outside.

Chapter 29 - Other side of the bars



[Drops of blood meet the mossy underground that was hidden by tall grass for the most part. Nicole finds herself in an extremely disoriented state as her eyes can't move away from the bloody carcass that lies in front of her paws. She's completely frozen in her pose, with all four paws being on the ground and a bent back that reflects shock. Another wolf had fallen to her feet after completely losing it another time by the wolf's presence having been enough to make her run away from her parents. She wishes she could've stayed put to make a return to the car by their side, but her intuition knew that wouldn't have a good ending. As soon as she feels the shock running through her lessen, she closes her eyes and attempts getting up from the rough ground. The soaked bandage around her shoulder proves how poorly the wound is healing, but it surprises her when the pain is way less now. She knows she's anything but stable in this moment, but feels confused for having her normal senses as well. Once discovering she can move her damaged arm effortlessly, she gets on her hind legs and takes a few steps back from the dead wolf. However her shock fades, it soon gets replaced by a rush of unease when her legs don't manage to carry her. She drops to the underground again and has to stretch her arms out to prevent collapsing, like many times before. Her eyes narrow as she's unable to understand what's occurring to her this time.

" You gave in quickly... "

"...What?"

*" **I really thought that conversation with our parents kept us intrigued...** "*

"What are you talking about?! I ran away because YOU decided to act up!"

*" **Tsk, well I am sorry for playing a fair game by defending myself!** "*

"Be as sarcastic as you want, I don't even know what I'm supposed to do with you anyways... Why do you hate wolves so much? I can't take being triggered by those innocent creatures any longer!"

*" **Grrmph... Seems like you haven't lost your pathetic curiosity.** "*

"You told me a lot before... since you claim 'it won't matter anymore anyway'."

*" **Ugh... Well... It seems like I've underestimated things...** "*

"What does that mean?"

*" **I didn't expect us to survive that fall... I didn't expect to still be. Here. At all. We were supposed to be dead already... Grrr- I knew those pet cats were a bad idea...** "*

"W-what?! What are you going on about? You're lacking even more context than before."

*" **What do you want me to do then? If you know so well how conversation works...** "*

"GOSHDARNIT! JUST TELL ME EVERYTHING THAT'S LEFT TO KNOW!"

...

"Upper Limit...? Look, this all isn't going to work if I'm going to stay as clueless as I am. You've claimed me being pathetic and dumb and... what's the word you always use-"

*" **INSUFFERABLE!** "*

"Yes, that. Well? How am I supposed to change from... an insufferable weakling to... someone who understands you? Because that's all I can get from you... That you're misunderstood."

*" **It feels like you're repeating yourself, but alright then. If you're so thirsty for knowledge that will affect your wellbeing heavily...** "*

*" **Our... well, your condition being fatal isn't news. Although I've noticed patterns throughout the years of being stuck with its heaviest tolls. Apparently, since you're a last MagoCat inheritor, you've gotten quite on top of the chain. That illness and I made you as feral as you are... A monster for which other predators are no match... Terrible, horrible strength that turned into a curse rather than a power. Eheh, those cats you ate... made you stronger for that reason.** "*

"I'm sorry, what?"

*" **It's part of your condition's deformedness. Ever since MagoCat genes started mutating in ways that were anything except healthy, its worst version evolved in you. You know about being the Decided One... but now you should know a price to the survival as that, is the consumption of other hunters...** "*

"WHAT? That's... rogue... T-that's DISGUSTING! I don't want to rely on such a crime as that!"

*" **And what about the other murders you committed? Aren't those crimes as well? Those weren't for food.** "*

The blue feline aggressively clenches her clawed paws against her head and throws them into the sand surrounding her, digging the keratin into the ground before getting herself together again.

"I'm SORRY? YOU YOURSELF REVEALED IN YOUR ACT THAT YOU DROOLED FOR THOSE RAVEN CHILDREN! You made me eat them, not just kill them... And let's not forget about what trauma you inflicted on my adoptive son... For the same reason..."

*" **Oh well, I failed to resist the desire. I'm a terrible animal after***

all, remember? "

"Ugh. You barely change! Back to your point though, I'm supposed to hunt other hunters now?!"

" If you want to expand your lifespan, yes. That explains why we're still alive in this moment... Why those little bones of yours haven't gotten evaporated under the pressure yet... "

"Yeargh... The thought of those dead cats only makes me sicker... I thought you wanted me dead? Yet you made me eat them?"

" That... Wasn't me... "

"Liar."

" No, it's that CONDITION OF YOURS, for the thousandth time! "

"Then how do you explain your eerily comments that came from you when I saw the lifeless body of that white cat in front of me?"

" I... It's... You won't understand... "

"OH, YES I WOULD! What did I just tell you about coming clean about everything?!"

" FINE! I DIDN'T want you DEAD yet, okay?! I... I don't even know what I want anymore... This condition's dread gave me the wish for us to pass away as soon as possible, simply because of how dangerous it started to become... But now... No matter how much I hate you, how much I hated having been trapped... It was hard to hate you. "

"W-what...? Hard to hate? H-how..."

Nicole's heart skips a beat and tears immediately evolve in her fatigued eyes. Her system trembles and she keeps staring at the moss in front of her while letting the entity speak.

" You're going to find it hard to believe, knowing you, but it's true. Despite the endless agony, you gave me a slight sense of safety... Even if you didn't know I existed for such a long time, it felt as if

you still were trying to be careful. You knew something was up with you, since we had to take that medicine from our parents, but never knew what exactly. That enraged me. The fact you didn't know... But... you couldn't have known. That's something that took a while for me to realize... "

"R-realize what...?"

" That you were the person at the other side of the bars... You know, I felt punished for something I didn't do. Existing. That was worth my punishment of the following years ever since I came to be inside you. But it wasn't my choice to exist... I felt so confused. Your body treated me like a criminal and I was bound to start acting like one because of that... And you, at the other side of those bars, having a choice, not getting tampered with the heavy pain all the time... made me jealous. It felt so unfair, but it was a shame you couldn't hear my resistance or rage... until... Well, you know. "

"I... I never thought of it in that way... Gosh I-... Why do you have to make it so hard for me... I would've felt bad for you if you didn't hurt me as much as you did."

" Hurt in what way?! You have to remember your condition had nothing to do with me! It only harmed me more! "

"I know, I know! I'm talking about how often you manipulated me... How often you kept me awake, tired me out, talked me into insanity... That was you."

" That was rage. I-it was me, I will be honest for a change. But... that was blind rage... "

"Well... At least I now understand why everything happened to me in the way it did. Such a shame it has to end like this..."

" Oh, it's not quite over yet. These recent conversations I've been able to have with you, despite how late they were, made me realize this all had to happen in order for me to tell you my story. Without all... of this... you probably still wouldn't have known about my existence, I could've lost even more grip over the

condition damaging your system or you would've died during an early transformation... "

"So, your view has changed? I can't believe it..."

" That's what I don't know... Because I have no idea what my view was in the first place. All I know is rage and how badly I wanted us to be dead. But now I don't know anymore... For the first time... there's something I DON'T know. "

"What do we do now...? I'm not sure if I want to continue living as cannibalistic, unstable monstrosity."

" That decision will be made eventually. We're running out of time right now. "

"W-what?"

" Remember I feel more of your physical system than your nerves pick up. We're deteriorating. Again. "

"T-then what do I do?! I might know more about what's happening, but I don't know how to fix any of it!"

" Eat. We've been so distracted by whatnot during our time in this wretched forest and time has passed. "

Nicole's eyes widen when she realizes what the Upper Limit is implying. She sits up straight and restlessly digs her claws into her muzzle, glaring at the dead wolf.

"No... NO!"

" I would've made you do it like before, but that was back when you didn't know how necessary it is... Take this as me trying to help you... The one thing you most likely didn't expect from me... "

"No, no... You're NOT going to talk me into this. Not this time... Last time I did this I wasn't at my conscious. Now, I feel everything."

" I disagree. You're clearly not feeling how hungry you are right now. "

"I'm not hungry."

*" **Are you sure about that?** "*

Just when the entity spoke those words, Nicole's ears lower further to the back of her head when she hears her stomach growling, proving she was wrong. She shakes her head and hides her face with her paws, unsure when she'd lose control another time. The carcass burns in the corner of her vision, almost as if the lifeless eyes of the wolf still are able to see and stare into hers. It doesn't take long before her vision starts blurring out a bit and she feels her limbs becoming heavier.

*" **So, what will it be...?** "*

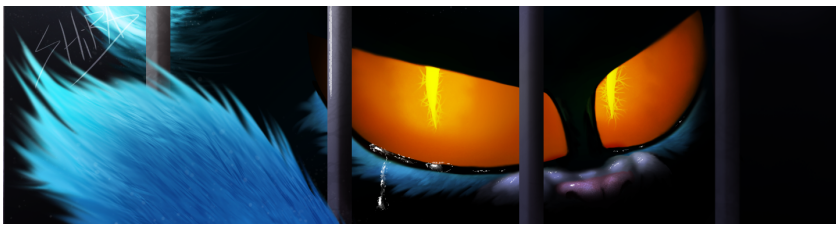
The blue feline can't control her upwelling urges any longer, especially after having gotten to know those originated from her body itself. She releases an aggravated snarl and goes along with her feral movements when crawling towards the carcass on all fours. Her head dangles as it aches and her vision worsens. She eventually manages to grasp hold onto the long tufts of fur and presses her paws onto the cold skin, sniffling her nose once her head is closer as well. She then doesn't hesitate a single bit when digging her fangs into the tough flesh, following a similar craving she felt before and was unable to resist.

*" **You know, your flawed system caused us not being that different after all... Look who's just as unable to control desires as me.** "*

Nicole would've wanted to be able to snap back at the entity's taunting, but currently lacks the power to form any words and she keeps munching on the dead canine. An unsettling, brief chuckle from the entity follows before its voice becomes presumably absent again. The ragged up feline helplessly struggles with getting her clear mind back as she feels the need to satisfy her hunger as well as gaining strength she's missing. An almost complete silence cuts through the air in her surroundings when she eventually calms a bit down and receives the ability to look around again. Having assumed she's on her own while wishing no one would've seen her at the same time, it surprises her when a sudden bright, artificial light catches her attention. Such a light can only mean individuals

from town would be near... But how? Has the force made a return with new recruits? Or are there people she knows...? Nicole's pupils constrict further than they already were and turns her head, with her paws and face being covered in blood. Her eyes widen in her angry expression and she tries to recognize any of the far-away silhouettes being revealed by the light.

Chapter 30 - Meltdown



[The closer the feline came towards the light, as she carefully approached, the more obvious the silhouettes became. Another force troop. She briefly remembers the previous wave of them having been unable to defeat her because of their poor weapon choice. A part of her conscious wishes for the officers not having changed it, yet she expects that won't be the case. But despite knowing well they want her dead, her body shows no resistance when she keeps walking towards the closest light sources, presumably lanterns. Partly being unbothered to get on her hind legs, she decides on keeping a low profile as much as she can and approaches an opened gate. The black and green stripes painted on the wallboards gives away it's Elmore's only military base. *Since when had it been located in the forest?*, Nicole thinks to herself. Although there's no time to be worried about that right now. She currently can only be glad about the fact she has her own five feet five inch silhouette, an advantage to her hiding. The blue cat peeks from the wall's corner next to the entrance and notices how the base seems to be less crowded than she expected. She dares to take a small sidestep into the gate's opening and her silhouette becomes painted with a yellow layer by the bright light. Large containers presumably filled with gasoline surround the middle area, which is completely empty except for two circling guards, and tall temporary buildings in the corners mark where the force spends most of their time. The feline would've wished she was able to identify some other silhouettes at the very back fence, but her aching head causes her to struggle with focusing.

Once the two guards turn their backs away from her direction, she takes her chance to take a look inside and sprints towards the

nearest container as fast as she can. Crouching behind the large metal construction, she needs a moment to catch her breath and meanwhile tries to find out what's being planned here. Is this entire operation built simply to kill *her*? Too many questions evolve inside her head, but she doesn't know if she'll get any of them answered. A puddle of rain that didn't wash away yet catches her attention when she turns her head. Remembering when she first arrived at this forest in the first place, and having had a bad relapse by seeing her reflection in one, tears evolve in her eyes as she forces herself to take a look. To her surprise, her morphed structure hasn't worsened like she expected it would. But she can't feel glad about it either, since her mid-long fangs, tangled fur and distorted bone structure disgust her. She also never understood why she, and the Upper Limit in its physique, had gotten that skinny overtime. She knows her limbs and shoulders received their muscle from the beast's strength and all those feral episodes, but she never knew why the rest of her figure stayed so scrawny. Back during the conflict she had with her condition and her adoptive son Darwin, she found herself in that unhealthy state for the first time. And it never changed ever since. All those creatures she murdered, and ate... Shouldn't they have made her much stronger than she is now? Or wasn't it enough? Or... did they cause what she has become now?

Blood.

She interrupts her thoughts once seeing the blood on her face. No time to whine about an incurable physical sickness she only has to get used to. That blood has to get off. Nicole aggressively shakes her head to draw out any other thoughts that'd potentially well up and uses the water from the puddle to wash her face clean with her paws. The tears that were evolving earlier take shape further until they flow down her face. Like many times before. Crying has become so usual for her that she no longer bothers hiding it. Not like before. Most of her life the surroundings forced a mask onto her which she struggled with wearing. Barely a chance to be herself, just because of the fear of getting hurt. Or hurting others. She used to despise crying because of how weak it made her look, but she no longer cares. She, the past few years, only now realized how much pain she's going through and accepted that it is natural to cry because of it. She'll never forget how most people in her life told

her how good she had it and how grateful she had to be, but in a negative way. Others thought she was living a fairy-tale for having been able to build up so much with so little. But barely anyone knew what went on before and behind that. It wasn't anyone's business, yet Nicole had wished more people showed more understanding for what actually could be going on. And once that eventually got revealed to the public, people turned their back on her, painted her as a monster or only wanted to break her further.

Nicole realizes how much she's actually gotten to know about her condition and the entity now. Even if only the past few years contained most of her dread by far, her eyes got opened widely when realizing everything had been building up from the moment she was born. She finds it complicated to accept she was bound to be born with a challenge, the condition, but she knows well nothing could've changed anyway. Getting to know about being the Decided One was another important part of her realization, and she's certainly grateful for how her fate helped breaking the curse. Even if she has to take the most toll compared to any other MagoCat-gene inheritor, the thought of the condition's overpassing coming to an end sparks a bit of light in her.

She lets out a soft, subtle chuckle as tears still accompany her grieved face while she keeps staring into the puddle. *It's not over yet,* she thinks. The blue feline then turns her head and prepares to get up, but gets startled by a figure suddenly accompanying her. She turns around in a rush while hissing in shock and slips by the puddle's water, only to end up in an awkward cowering, crouching pose. She then cools down a slight bit when she recognizes the black feathers of the avian in front of her.]

Nicole: E-Erin?

Erin: Hey, it's okay! I'm not gonna hurt you!

Nicole: [Whimpering] I'm sorry, I'm sorry- I'm so sorry! All this chaos I've caused... I know this whole operation is set against me! I'm not supposed to be here-

Erin: Hey-hey, don't panic! Please! It's okay. I'm not gonna turn you in. I don't even want them to get you, which is why I'm only

offering to help!

Nicole: A-are you s-sure? T-the last thing I did to you was committing a crime... and not even saying goodbye when I heard you quit.

Erin: I understand. Please, trust me. You don't owe me anything. You have to know I have full understanding for what has been occurring to you, nothing was your fault... I studied as much about your condition and mental health as I could. It's just a shame I'm almost the only one who believes it.

Nicole: [Sighs] I know... Which is why I no longer want to be a burden for you...

Erin: Burden?! Mrs. Watterson, you've been an extremely loyal patient for such a long time. No matter what levels your condition exceeds, it will still be my honour to assist you in any way possible.

Nicole: Gosh- Y-you're too good for this world. I just... don't feel like I deserved it...

Erin: You do. You goshdarn really do! I know you're an amazing mother with three extraordinary sweet children and a loving husband. I've seen you try so hard to remember to follow my prescriptions, you've always shown your most determined side and you definitely deserve more. What you don't deserve is all that agony that formed the toll of something you couldn't have done anything about.

[Nicole keeps silent for a second and stares at the ground, only to immediately raise her head again when Erin puts one of his wings on her shoulder. He shows a slight smile, trying to reassure her despite still being stuck with a lot of grief of his own.]

Erin: Now come on. Let's get you out of here and back to your family. I know that they were on their way to find you.

Nicole: Yeah... I've seen them. They must be worried about me again. A stupid little incident caused me to run away another time, ugh...

Erin: Hey, give it time. At least you've encountered them, now you can return.

Nicole: H-how are you planning on getting me out of this though? I- I just don't know if I can get my life in town back at all...

Erin: You actually can. It's a shame they've forcibly taken the medical docs from me, but I've realized the government from this generation has clearly forgotten the most important law of Elmore.

Nicole: Which is?

Erin: That it's a colourful place for everyone to live in, no matter size, shape, species, whatever. And that any citizen deserves the help they need to continue living safely in this town.

Nicole: [Scoffs] If only they remembered that before writing out my citizen rejection tag...

Erin: I in no way believe that tag was a real thing... if I'm brutally honest. It sounds ridiculous to me, and I honestly expected them to give you the same treatment as the asylum werewolves, as worst potential consequence. Not just... classifying you as feral animal?!

Nicole: Well, I guess they wrote something special just for me.

Erin: Try not to take it personal, no matter how hard that is. Fear does a lot with people and mainly results in negative consequences alone.

Nicole: Heh... I know about that too well. But... wait, back to what you were saying earlier; they've taken the medical documents from you?!

Erin: Yes, unfortunately. They've asked me for information before, but once I realized it was pavement for a road towards killing you I attempted sabotage.

Nicole: So that's why the previous wave had machineguns on them! Now I know why... You have never given them the documents at all, did you...

Erin: I did not. Not only would that break my trust contract for my position as therapist, but would also be extremely unethical and backwards to do.

Nicole: Goshdarnit- why are you the only person that uses their wisdom to help me instead of against me-

[Erin has no chance to reply as both the avian and feline get startled by a masculine yell from behind them. They realize their conversation got them distracted and the force's commander approaches with crossed arms, presumably fuming in frustration. He doesn't hesitate grabbing the two by the arm and pulls them with him towards the middle area of the base. He roughly pushes the two once letting go and Erin loses his balance before crashing onto the ground. Nicole violently exposes her monstrous teeth and takes a sidestep to protect the floored raven. The commander folds his arms and his golden badge reflects the lantern's light, which is pinned to his camouflage-printed uniform.]

Officer: Mr. Warrington?! What is the meaning of this?! I thought we had an agreement from the start of this mission!

Erin: Oh come on, leave it for once! Like I've already tried to convince you many times, Nicole is innocent! This whole organization isn't gonna fix anything and you've got no idea what sort of trouble you're working yourself into!

Officer: Trouble?! Oh please, this kitty is down... after a wave of flames...

[Nicole's eyes widen once realizing her main weakness has gotten exposed and even manages to catch a glimpse of a piece of paper in the commander's pocket. The medical documents. *What a surprise*. She hesitates taking any action but instead keeps her defensive pose while not letting her lips cover up her teeth anything soon. Erin gets himself together while getting up from the floor and dusts off his shoulders.]

Erin: I'm talking about the government, not her! You're committing a crime by pursuing an organized murder on a citizen, no matter if they have a criminal record or not!

Officer: She's NOT a citizen ANYMORE! The tag, which by the way had been written by the government itself, indicates she had been rejected from the moment the spilling of blood started increasing!

Erin: Proves who?! The government consist many unknown figures and you don't know who came up with that tag! Such a tag goes against the ground law of Elmore! Such a disappointment that you, the commander, don't memorize it...

Officer: Then what do you want us to do?! This... MONSTROSITY has shown supernatural powers we can't contain! Who knows who's gonna be murdered next?! And who's to say for sure she's the only one?!

Erin: This is why you listen to someone with expertise... I am her therapist! I KNOW what she's dealing with and despite this condition being a mystery, I've gotten to know more than anyone out here loading guns!

Officer: You're not a therapist anymore, Mr. Warrington. That tag of your quitting is a genuine one, if you're so keen on genuineness.

[Erin keeps silent as a sensitive nerve gets hit and he lowers his head. Nicole's ears lower by seeing how the raven visibly is losing his confidence and she fears what's next.]

Officer: Have you really... really forgotten what the reason was for your quitting...?

Erin: N-no- d-don't say i-it...

Officer: Your children, Mr. Warrington. This beast... murdered, no wait- ATE your children as if they weren't worth anything more than a pebble.

[Nicole's heart sinks deeply as the last thing she wanted was to be reminded of that event. Having eaten a wolf carcass earlier as well doesn't help making her feel less nauseous out of a sudden and her system begins trembling... like it did many times before. The commander then suddenly sidesteps and pulls out a foldable, surprisingly large, flamethrower and loads it. The blue feline gives

up on her potential attempts to subdue her trigger and her eyes narrow once catching a glimpse of it. Her voice lowers itself throughout a growl she releases and this only motivates the commander to aim the fire weapon at her. Erin doesn't know what to do out of a sudden, as flashbacks run through his mind and even get the best of him. The wretched memory of having seen his kids' bloodstained feathers spread in their room weakens him so badly that he doesn't feel worth anything as soon as the officer reminded him. Nicole knows she's on her own now... but not fully... She has never been... fully... alone.

*" **THIS SUCKER WANTS OUR HEAD!** "*

*" **ACT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!** "*

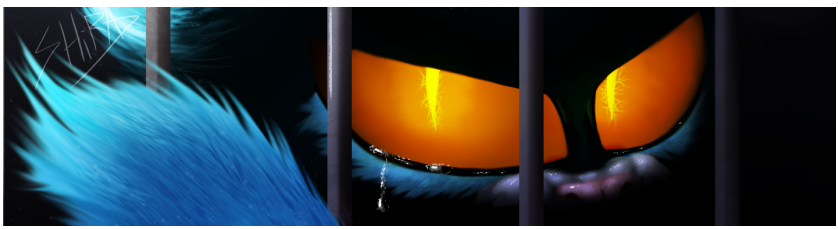
For the first time it's not too much of an unpleasant surprise to hear the Upper Limit's rogue voice echo inside her head. Despite hating her agony so deeply, she lets it run over her and pounces right onto the commander without hesitation, embracing the beginning transformation in the process. The commander didn't expect the feline being able to act so quickly out of a sudden and fails to flinch at the right time. His firearm drops to the ground and he gets captured by two clawed paws that only increase in size, as well as the figure they belong to.]

Nicole: [Roaring] **EMBRACE YOUR DESTINED FATE, TRAITOOOOR!**

[The beast immediately sinks its huge teeth into the throat of the humanoid as soon as it bellowed those words and not a following sign of life gets shown by the commander. His lifeless blood-drenched body meets the asphalt ground like a bag of dirt being dropped and the feline monster spits out a gallon of blood. It doesn't even bother to strengthen itself up by feeding off his flesh and instead turns to face the petrified raven, who didn't even have the time to process what just happened in front of him. His first shock turns into a second one when his fight-or-flight response gets triggered by the approaching beast. Even though he knows lots about the sickness to the day, its mysterious nature and the consequential beast being main aspects caught him in fear. The raven panics as his normal senses seem too slow to pick an action

and he jumps forward, reaching for the flamethrower. His legs don't hesitate from allowing him to sprint away for a few feet, but the feline clearly being too agile causes him to run out of options. Even worse, he trips over a dislocated tile and falls to the ground, tightly holding on to the weapon to break his fall. Erin then turns around as quickly as he can, but faces nothing but the monster preparing to lurch towards him. He panics once again while loading the flamethrower and doesn't even think when pulling the trigger. But worst of all, on top of that, he realizes it's the same flamethrower he sabotaged before handing it to the commander. The raven knew he would have one by hand and decided to clog the gas chamber of the weapon. But now he utterly regrets it. Of course he wouldn't want to have the beast killed, but he can't help but hyperventilating once simply keeping it at a distance is no longer a possible option...

Chapter 31 - Emerging absolution



[Outside light sneaking through the openings in the curtains revealed a brighter summer afternoon than those of the past few days, with them having been consistently cloudy. The light gives a vibrant ambient to the hospital room, of which the fully white furniture makes everything seem even brighter. But despite the increased light on this day normally being enough to awaken any snoozing soul, the blue feline does not express any sign of life. She sits upright in a medical bed, completely still with only the fabric of her gown simultaneously moving along with her slow breathing. Her eyes are opened and don't really blink much, almost as if she's frozen in time. But that obviously isn't the case. She can't remember for how long she had been sitting like this, but it's also been a while since a nurse came checking on her. Her body seems as if it's in a sort of trance, but her mind on the other hand is far from as peaceful. Racing thoughts and undecipherable noise run through her head. She doesn't even know what she's supposed to feel, supposed to think, and can't recall if she experienced this before. Everything around her feels and seems blurry, with variously colored patches of mist floating around. She feels nothing. She only hears the soft beep of her heartrate monitor distortedly, as if it's underwater or far away. But it's in fact right next to her. Next to her bed and next to the device that provides her with intravenous infusion. She can't even remember any of the doctors attaching that cable to her. Then, what does she remember?

Oh, the majority of memory in fact did not get lost.

"So… what now?"

Nicole's pupils tremble for a brief second when that voice became the first genuinely audible thing inside her head. That deep, rough and obscure voice. Familiar voice.

"What's going on...? Where have I been?"

"Don't worry about it. Time has passed during the time we've been as knocked out as we were. Or… are. Depending on how you feel."

"I literally have no idea what you're talking about. It feels as if I just woke up, yet... I can't feel anything at all."

"Oh?"

"I know I'm sitting still, in this room... this room which I haven't been able to recognize for a while. But I can't feel anything. Am I still alive? I assume I am... But it feels as if I'm elsewhere..."

"Elsewhere? That sounds abstract, especially coming from your mouth."

"Yes, elsewhere. I don't feel 'here'. I don't feel... like me... Oh, what does it matter anyway."

"It does matter. I'm messing with you anyway. I know exactly what's going on."

"W-what?"

"We're finally having an opportunity to talk properly again. But this time, we've closed off all distractions around us. For clearance. For safety. Nothing to be alarmed of really. It's something our mind has developed over the years of sharing the physical system with a dreadful condition, but I didn't expect to be able to reach you during an occurrence like this."

"Do you mean... I've been doing this before then?"

"You most certainly can't remember or weren't aware during other times, but yes. I don't doubt it, and remember I've been with you for longer than you can remember."

"Gosh... It's a lot what happened, isn't it..."

"True, but do you really want to go back and recall it all?"

"You don't, I assume?"

"No... Preferably not."

...

"I've made... huge mistakes, Nicole. You're most likely gonna say 'me too, don't worry', but... it is to be worried about. Look what happened to us... How we turned out..."

"You just said you didn't want to think about the past."

"This isn't about the past. This is about what has affected us over such a long timespan and how we'll have to deal with confronting consequences in the now."

"But... what if those get fixed? If we survived a near-death, I'm sure we can take a long, deep breath now."

"Maybe. Well... back to my earlier question...

What now? "

"I honestly wouldn't know what your comforts and discomforts actually are, so I'm surprised you're asking me that question."

"Trust me, it's up to you now. You've proven me wrong of many things, with one of those being ending up dead which obviously didn't happen, so I think it's safe to say the gears belong to you now. I've broken enough for this body, you were the only one trying to fix it all along."

"I... didn't expect you to say that... if I'm completely honest..."

"I know, I know. It's understandable if you don't fully trust me, or don't fully trust me yet. But as I refuse to go back to the past, I'm only offering you the choice now. You must remember one thing from before, and that's that I've been wanting to heal as much as you did..."

"It's... fine... I'll get used to it, at some point. I just need time... A LOT of time to process it, you know?"

"I understand. I mean what could I do? Our fallback caused me devolving back into the state I had as entity before hell broke loose. Only difference then, is that I'm able to speak to you now, but..."

"What do you mean?"

"Overtime I had received the power to control more and more parts of our physical system, with it being the root for many triggers resulting in episodes... Despite it not always having been entirely me pulling those strings. But... I still had that ability. Well, it's gone now. Back to the beginning."

"No, Upper Limit, not back to the beginning. You've been emphasizing on not returning to the past a few times now and I will stick to that myself. You're able to speak to me now, unlike what was the case before, right? And now I know way more about you and where you came from than before, you're getting me?"

"Well, yes."

"Then stop worrying. I need time to process, but that doesn't mean I'm giving up on you. I didn't know about your existence before, but now I do. Please remember that."

"I know... You have a point, I guess..."

...

"You know what the actual reason for my redemption is...? You've been out for a while, but I was up all the time. I had the chance to think, while letting our body rest and recover. You're aware of how most of my rage and unhinged traits originated from having

been trapped because of the condition. You're aware of you being the last one to be dreaded with faulted DNA after Hana.

Well, since I knew about Hana's phenomenon way before you, I feared. I feared greatly. I feared you were potentially going to be as reckless and careless as she was. And despite her not having had the same situation for an entity such as me to evolve, something still struck me. But after all the things I did to you, all the mess we've made, the mess I made... I got to know you and your motives better. After every time you had rampaged around in that monstrous state, you immediately searched for solutions and wanted to know what it was. You felt grief and rage towards yourself for all that happened, hated your condition and hated yourself for it... It was like a mirror to me.

Besides, you never intended to use your illness as excuse, and the way every rampage resulted in weeks or months of necessary recovery, which you took, caught me witnessing a different type of victim I didn't think you would be. You were or are a victim, but never pulled that role towards yourself... It's all that. The way you were being so careful. You only hated me because I expressed hatred to you... which I only now understand. I thought you were bound to be my enemy, only for it to turn out we just had to learn how to live with each other. And now I'm open for that. To actually... learn. Could you, teach me... how to learn? "

"Gosh I-... I don't know what to-"

"You don't have to say anything. This is just... my conclusion of having been thinking nonstop for the past few days. Again, take your time to process everything. But at least I've given you my explanation."

"I appreciate it. And yes, I do would like... to teach you how to learn. Although, I'll try my best of course. I still have a lot to learn myself... Just like how I think it's about time I start accepting myself for having been born like this. Because some things are out of your control and are things you cannot decide. Even if they're negative, or insanely terrible, it's about how you strive for becoming a better person and how careful you genuinely have to be with yourself."

"That's a good note to keep in mind. Our remaining challenge, besides... us being us... stays what we're gonna do about our physical morphing. Our body is in poor condition and I no longer know its status because of having lost control over its bits."

"It's gonna be fine. I'm at a hospital for a reason. Yet... a reason I cannot recall right now?"

"I hated forcing you to unethically eat specimen identified as fellow hunters on our level... But it was our only way to survive, eventually. It's why that plant stopped having effect as well."

"There must be another solution surely. I remember the days when I could only sink my teeth into fish or other herbivorous flesh. There must be a way to return to that."

"I hope so at least. Thinking back makes me realize what sort of insane, psychopathic monster I was, only for me to have insulted you with those same words..."

"That's... a thing called projection, Upper Limit. It's very normal to experience that. It's simply the context of our supernatural situation that increases the bar, but... you get what I mean."

"I just can't believe how hypocritical the things I said and did were as well..."

"If it reassures you, the fact you're able to own up to that now whilst realizing it was wrong means you've grown. And remember, Upper Limit, the very you didn't want to... go back to the past, hmm?"

"Yeah, yeah, I should stop that. You're... right."

"Besides, you don't have anything to do with the condition, despite how closely connected you had gotten to it. All because of things neither of us could control and things that treated both of us wrongly. I understand what it has done to you. But-"

"You need time to process what it has done to you as well, I get it."

"Exactly. Let that relieve you at least."

"Well, I'm honestly very glad to hear you say that... that I'm not part of the condition. I remember trying to tell you that but you never understood, or hadn't been able to understand.

Since you've drawn your conclusion about that anyways, what about I tell you something I never thought I'd end up telling? "

"Oh...? What is it?"

"The 'Upper Limit' is a nickname you had given me ever since I made a first impression in one of your nightmares... which was simply the same name you gave our condition, for it having been unnamed before."

"Oh... I see. You rather not be affiliated with that name anymore?"

"It's not really that big of a deal to me if I'm honest, but I do have an own name. The dreading time of insanity almost made me forget it, but I do."

"Just let me know what you prefer to be mentioned as."

"I do not have preference. But... it's 'Furore'. Furious, rogued and reckless, it's a combination of words that coincidentally fuse into it, but still marks main aspects of what has defined most of my legacy. I refuse to continue being ashamed of it, no matter how much of a challenge that'll be for me, but I will not brush over all the damage I did to you."

"That's really meaningful. I respect that. Even if you don't have preference, I find solace in referring you by who you truly are."

"Truly?"

"Yes. What I also do know is true, is that you're the part of me that has been trapped, misunderstood and mistreated as much as I myself have been. But that first bit especially... You're part of me, and that'll never change. Better learn how to live on with that, right?"

Nothing else is further audible when Furore's voice and presences fades, except for one final, approving meow echoing into silence...

"Nicole...?"

"Nicole?!"

Another familiar, but external, voice called out for her. Nicole clearly hadn't been moving for a while and subtle twitching of her shoulders caught the ones around her off guard. It's been almost an hour since those figures came into the hospital room. Patiently they waited once encountering the blue feline in her stand-by. Luckily enough, a nurse had been able to diagnose some of the phenomenon her system was showing, a tiny revelation to the still existing dread of her condition's rareness. Nicole's eyelids feel heavy once she slowly receives her full conscious back. The voice calling out her name becomes recognizable and she slowly turns her head, only to immediately almost faint and the figure next to her bed takes a sprint to catch her head. She blinks slowly as her pupils try to get used to normal vision again and she can hear her heart pounding in her head. The paw that supports her head radiates a familiar warmth and the figure it belongs to carries a scent she can recognize. Her nose twitches for a second as her body gets itself together and she opens her eyes further...]

Nicole: R-... Richard?

[The pink bunny can't contain his tears any longer and moves forward to give her a tight hug. He sniffles and holds his wife as closely as he can. She didn't expect his emotionality and immediately feels her own sensitive side emerge from within her. She stays silent, but tears start forming in her eyes.]

Richard: I'm so glad y-you're okay! I- I've been worried, like I always am, but... now I seriously thought I could lose you another time!

Nicole: [Groaning] W-wharr- What happened?

Richard: The nurse told us you've been showing some moments of zoning out here and there. Well, it was more than zoning out they said, but... the idea is there.

Anais: Emerging dissociation...

[Richard and Nicole both get surprised by the little bunny suddenly having gotten closer to them, and turn their heads to face her.]

Anais: ...A phenomenon where said patient experiences an 'out-of-body' experience, characterized by a strong type of shielding which a brain does to protect itself. I have to admit I can't elaborate much on this one... but it's what the nurse said. Mom's traumatized brain is... protecting itself.

Nicole: A-Anais? I-is everyone of you there?!

[Anais wipes an upwelling tear away and her informative face fades into a grieved one as she runs up to her mother, followed by her older brothers.]

Gumball: Thank gosh you're alive!

[Darwin can't even find the strength to form any words and instead sobs while joining his siblings in the hug to their mother. Nicole's tears multiply and she holds her kids closely, the way she just hugged her husband.]

Nicole: [Sniffs] I'm- so glad to see all of you... I never... ever wanted to lose you.

Anais: I'm so happy to have you back, Mom. You should know you've been quite of a frozen statue last days...

Nicole: Great goodness- has it been that long?!

Richard: Like our daughter said... your mind has had quite a lot of toll to deal with. Especially after... the fire.

Nicole: Fire...?

Richard: Penny found you at the back of the forest's military base after insisting on looking for you. Apparently a huge fire broke out caused by the damaged gasoline cylinders. No one is really the blame for it, but it's assumed mayhem emerged after you transformed once again.

Nicole: Wait! I do remember that! Well... partly then. I got into a

fight with the commander once I found out they used Erin to get ahold of my medical documents. To find out my weaknesses, that was. Next thing I knew is killing the guy with my bare paws and facing Erin's terrified face. Everything after that... empty.

Richard: Well that's when the fire broke out. I've heard no one returned from the demolished base alive... except you then.

Nicole: W-wait... Does that mean-

Richard: [Sighs] Yes. It's not easy for me to tell you this... but Erin unfortunately passed away.

[Nicole's pupils constrict at the verge of terror and she gasps while digging her unsheathing claws into her muzzle. She doesn't let go of her head while wildly trying to grasp onto her unstable perception.

Nicole: [Sobbing] N-NO! DID I KILL HIM?! It can't be, it can't be!

Richard: N-no, you didn't, please!

[Richard carefully grabs her wrists and keeps holding them to prevent her from potentially harming herself, thoroughly looking her into the eye. His heart sinks upon seeing the absolute pain in her reddened eyes and doesn't know if he regrets breaking the news to her moments after her awakening. He didn't want to lie either.]

Richard: It was a huge fire. Gasoline being the cause made it even more dangerous. Your monstrous form actually saved your body from worse damage.

Nicole: D-didn't I... [Coughs] C-cause the fire...?

Richard: It was all an accident, honey. Please trust me on that. The whole government's operation shouldn't have been there in the first place and they undoubtedly didn't expect their target to appear at their door. Whatever you did on that spot, it wasn't all you.

Nicole: [Whispers] *Furore...*

Richard: W-who...?

Nicole: [Sighs] I just realized I barely have spoken about my experiences besides letting you witness a raging beast cross your path...

Richard: Hey, it takes time. Talking about things like that isn't easy.

Anais: I can imagine you needed a lot of time to yourself as well, Mom. I'm really sorry you have to deal with all this... It's been such a long time you've been in that state.

Nicole: It's just... I feel ashamed for not having asked for help earlier... Or for, letting you all see me like this during all that time. None of you deserve to have a mother like that.

Richard: You did your very best. I know that, Nicole. You shouldn't be so strict with yourself all the time. You've shown so many great things and still are so capable of good... You might not even see it.

Nicole: I honestly haven't seen anything... clearly... in a while. I've been stuck in this hell of bad and worse, it felt so endless...

Richard: Well, you're alive and talking to us now. That's what matters. We can fix and let things recover. Together. Like a family.

Nicole: B-but what if I mess up again?

Richard: You won't. I know you won't. You're extremely strong and you've shown that so often during this time. I know you will do amazing. We, and some contacted medical sources, are the ones who will help you during this time.

Nicole: Medical sources...?

Richard: Well... Since you have reached quite a severe level of illness, you'll have to stay in a mental hospital for a while.

[Nicole's ears lower further to the back of her head and a slight frown deepens the grief expressed on her face. She looks down and stares at her blanket, seeing her husband's blurred silhouette in the corner of her vision.]

Nicole: W-what...? I-...

Richard: It's for the best, honey... Especially after Erin's passing and his inability to help you on his own... No offence to him of course! But... you know...

Nicole: [Sighs] I do remain having a curse of a condition transforming me into a fully fledged monster at times, yes...

Richard: Hey, you'll get a grip on this. As long as you understand why we made the choices that we made.

Nicole: I know. It's not that I refuse to go... But... it just feels so weird now. After everything I've been through... I thought it was gonna blow over back then just fine. I thought I was able to heal myself by just... being better.

Richard: Unfortunately it doesn't work like that.

Nicole: I'm sorry I didn't tell enough about my experiences in general. I should've asked for help way earlier.

Richard: You can't fix the past. And that's okay. No one can. But it's about what you're gonna do now.

Nicole: Heh... I said something similar to Furore...

[Nicole's expression turns to slightly brighter when speaking those words, clearly having remembered all that was said before awakening.]

Richard: I'm very sorry but who's-

Nicole: It's the Upper Limit! You've... missed a lot... I don't know when I'll have the chance to tell you everything.

Richard: Well, no need to rush. Tell what you want to tell, whenever you're ready.

[Nicole doesn't say another word but smiles instead as soon as he spoke those words. She glances one more time at her three children and they return subtle smiles of their own. She hadn't smiled in a

very long time...]

"Gosh... It's a lot what happened, isn't it..."

"It's been enough of that. I think I've found my real fate, eventually. Let the journey finally begin- or... continue, depending on how it's seen... Time for me to heal. Wait... For ***us*** *to heal."*

End of Claws of Rage – Transformation Tragedies.

I hope you enjoyed another 31 chapters, forming the threequel and final book, in this fanfiction saga!

The CoR trilogy is hereby concluded and its main plot has come to an end.

Saga contributory writing is underway and will be there when the time is right, and I hope you look forward to those anyhow. Once again thanks so much for all the support that has been given to these books and I gladly will continue my journey as hobbyist writer.

- Black Dog Productions

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